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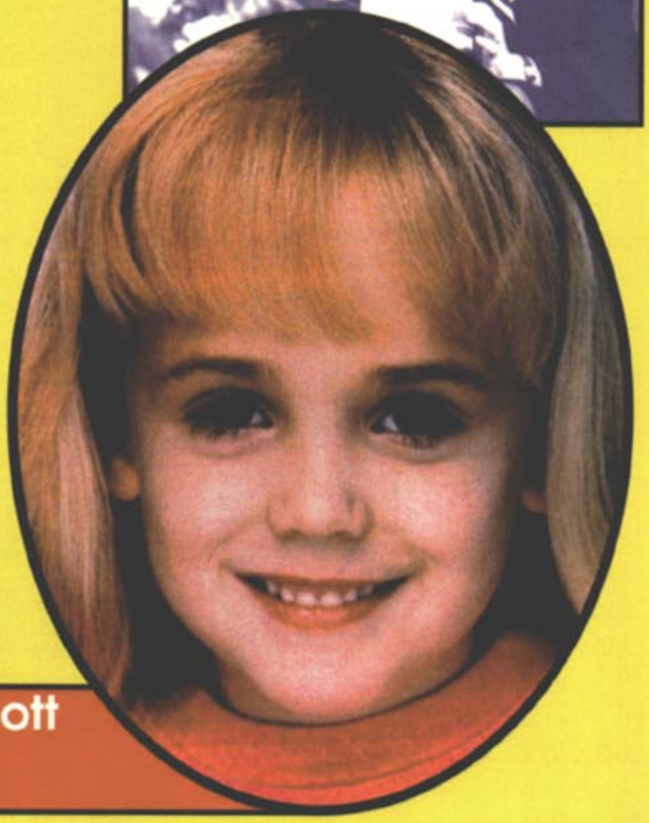

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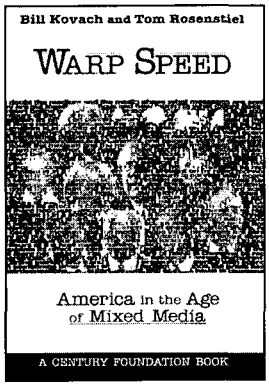

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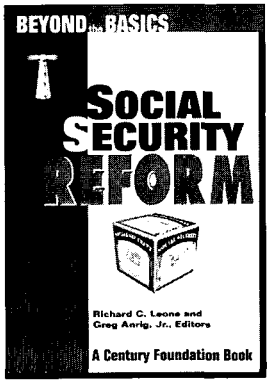

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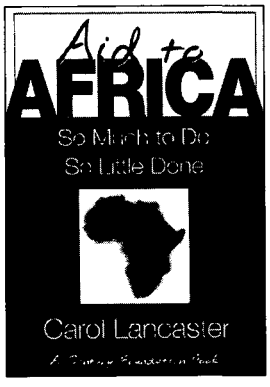

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Letters

Right and Wrong

Ms. Polgreen's article, "The Death of Local Radio" (April 1999) could not miss the point more. She states that the important result of consolidation has been that playlists are selected by researchers who live and work hundreds of miles away and that new artists have difficulties getting their music played on radio stations. Life as we know it will not end because an artist doesn't get his or her music on a radio station. It is ending because consolidation has led to the public being bombarded with only an extreme right-wing point on view.

In one way or another, the message is always anti-public and pro-deregulation, privatization and corporate welfare. Most of all it is foaming-at-the-mouth, rabid Clinton-hating. During Monicagate, Jacor called itself "Impeachment Radio" in many parts of the country and took time out from urging people to contact their representative and demand he or she vote to impeach only to talk sports. Having failed in their attempt to lynch the president, they have moved back to accusing him of multiple murders in the United States and Yugoslavia to divert public attention from his "selling out the United States to China".

CHARLES LEACH
Lynchburg, Ohio

Position Available

The *Monthly* is looking for a business manager. The job offers an opportunity to learn all aspects of magazine publishing. Duties include handling circulation, subscriptions, direct mail marketing, and budget. Send resumes to:

Lydia Polgreen
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1611 Connecticut Ave. NW
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Or email to "editors@washingtonmonthly.com"

Pay the Freight

I am more than willing to pay my share of educating and training Latinas, those who have entered the country legally ("Left Behind," April 1999). Anything less is short sighted.

But while we are fulfilling our moral and social duty in helping these women who are already here it is not unreasonable to suggest a moriatorium on admitting more of them who will simply compound the problem.

We have 26 million immigrants in America today. No one can accuse us of turning our backs on the huddled masses and no taxpayers on earth are as generous to immigrants.

HENRY CLIFFORD
Wainscott, N.Y.

Overcautious

Jonathan Chait, in "Giving Away the Farm" (April 1999), misrepresents some aspects of the argument to partially privatize Social Security. First, he says, people who invest their money wisely will get better returns than those who do not. Well, of course. I fail to see why that should make the blood run cold. We already accept vast inequalities in salary, investments, perks, and, yes, even Social Security checks, which right now give bigger checks to higher earners. Intelligence should have its reward.

Second, he says if you privately invest your retirement funds, then the state of the stock market in the year you retire "would have an enormous impact." Nonsense. I first became a small investor in 1992, when the market was at 3,000. Even if it fell by half this year, I have still gained 66 percent on my initial investment. Say the market does tank the year you retire. Unless it drops below the point is was when you first began working 45 years ago, you will come out ahead, perhaps a bit less, but far ahead anyway. (Needless to mention that the market has never fallen over the average 45-year working life.)

Finally, Chait echoes the dire warning of so many defenders of Social Security: in a private system, you may outlive your savings. You may, and preventing that would be up to you, just like preventing yourself from running out of groceries already is (my God, why do we trust the people with such an important task? Surely the government should step in!). But what if you don't outlive your savings? What if your savings outlive you? Unlike Social Security, which stops at your death, your accumulated private retirement funds could be handed down to your spouse or children. That would enrich your family, maybe giving your kids a chance for college or for a better life than you could afford. Over a generation or two, it could substantially improve your family's standard of living.

ARLYNDA LEE BOYER
Staunton, Va.

Now You See It ...

With regards to Charles Peters' item ("Tilting at Windmills," April 1999) in which he chastises *The New York Times* for burying Mr. Clinton's pledge of $18 million to the Troops for Teachers program: I have some first hand insight that may be of interest. I retired from the United States Air Force after 20 years of service in October 1998. During my transition assistance seminar, I was told, after inquiring about the Troops to Teachers program, that the program's funding had been pulled and this was no longer an option.

JEFFREY W. TRAUTNER
via email

The editor replies: The program was allowed to lapse. That's why I thought its resurrection was worth more than one line.

Book Bribes

[Re. the April 1999 "Memo of the Month," about an unsuccessful effort to donate a book to the White House]:

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What a gem! The ethics in government act has become the ignorance in government act. The first amendment guarantees the right "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." If a book about politics doesn't fall into that category, precious little does.

An extremely valuable book—say, a Gutenberg Bible—might reasonably be considered a bribe. Any standard, hardbound edition of a book still in print is clearly communication, not a bribe. The mentality of the lawyer who advised White House staff to return that book is a wonderful example of bureaucracy at its worst.

DAVID GRANT M.D.
San Antonio, TX

Say it Loud

There is something fundamentally amiss with Jason DeParle's article, The Silence of the Liberals", in the April 1999 *Washington Monthly*.

The headline is correct. Liberals are far too quiet nowadays, and when they do speak they usually bitch and moan instead of offering solutions. But for DeParle to suggest, "There's nothing inherently wrong with a strong conservative voice" and liberals "should challenge, in a thoughtful way, conservatives' instinctive hostility..." is simply absurd. When have conservatives ever been thoughtful or accepting of the liberal point of view?

It would be a tragic mistake to play pattycake with conservatives. By following DeParle's suggestions, liberals would only be applying band-aids to gross, open sores. The decay would go on, shuffled around, as in welfare to work, from an agency with some accountability (the government) to one with none (private industry).

If the left truly wants to get involved with this debate, it should offer some revolutionary ideas such as forming unions for the working poor, insisting on day care availability, health insurance, paid vacations, a way to pursue grievances, a way to hold private companies accountable to their employees, and a livable minimum wage.

STEPHEN J. DICK
Muncie, IN

Over-protected

After reading Robert Worth's "Guess Who Saved the South Bronx?" (April 1999), I'm sure I wasn't alone in welcoming the steady comeback of this gritty but proud borough.

The revitalization efforts going on in the South Bronx are a testimony both to the determination of local residents not to give up on their neighborhoods and to the willingness of government officials not to repeat the costly mistakes of the past.

But if the South Bronx is to maintain its momentum against what still are great odds, community leaders are also going to have to avoid the mistakes already being made by the institution Mr. Worth credits with saving the borough: big government.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may soon wreak the same havoc in the inner cities that "urban renewal" programs did a generation ago. In a bid to promote "environmental justice"—the belief that poor, mostly minority neighborhoods are disproportionately exposed to sources of pollution—EPA is proposing a scheme guaranteed to drive businesses out of or to discourage them from locating in inner cities, including the South Bronx. For companies planning to expand existing plants or build new ones in the inner cities, it will no longer suffice for them to comply with applicable environmental statutes. Under the procedure under consideration by EPA, the agency will determine whether a permit issued by a state environmental agency will have a "discriminatory impact," "disparate impact," or "other cognizable impacts" on a nearby minority community. These highly subjective terms are left conveniently undefined by EPA.

One could hardly think of a better way to force companies to abandon the inner city for suburbia's more congenial regulatory climate. And while Mr. Worth may not put much faith in "economic development," pointing out that Manhattan is only a 15-minute subway ride away, not everybody in the South Bronx is going to find a job on Broadway or Wall Street.

BONNER R. COHEN
Arlington, VA

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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

A Possible President • Celebrity Journalism • Credit Card Companies Crow • The Toilet Paper War • The Case of the Missing Plutonium

IF YOU WANT EVIDENCE THAT treating drug addicts is more effective than locking them up, take a look at Arizona, the first state to try treating all of its nonviolent drug offenders. The program saved the state more than $2.5 million in its first year of operation, according to a report issued by the Arizona Supreme Court.

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A REVEALING DIFFERENCE between "You've Got Mail" and the 1939 movie upon which it is based, "The Shop Around the Corner": The leading characters in the latter, played by James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan, were salespeople in a small retail store. In the 1990s version, the screenwriter, Nora Ephron, elevated their status. The Sullavan character, now played by Meg Ryan, is a bookstore owner and the Stewart character, now Tom Hanks, is the head of a mega bookstore. Could this be because Ephron felt today's audiences couldn't identify with anyone who loved a lowly salesperson, that to be a romantic object today you have to be glitzier, or at least the credible possessor of a nice apartment in Manhattan?

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$80,000 FOR EVERY 21 YEAR OLD, to be financed by a 2 percent tax on the property owned by the richest 40 percent. That's the proposal presented in *The Stakeholder Society* by Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott. I am sympathetic, but I wouldn't give it all to them at 21. Samuel Butler—I think it was either in *Erewhon* or *Erewhon Revisited*—discussed a similar idea and observed that even the brightest 21 year-olds are capable of behavior that reminds one of how close they are to adolescence. So why not give half at 21 and the other half at 30? Or maybe, unless the money is used for education, hold it all 'til 30. Judgment usually matures by that time and a stake can play a magical role. This magazine would not have happened if my parents hadn't given me $20,000 to help start it. Being able to invest my own money convinced other investors that I was serious.

The White House Correspondents' Dinner has become an embarrassment to the profession of journalism.

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TO GIVE YOU THE FLAVOR OF the White House Correspondents' Dinner, this year's guests included Larry Flynt, Sean Penn, Colin Powell, Claire Danes, Betty Currie, Henry Kissinger, Lucianne Goldberg, Val Kilmer, Vinny Testaverde, Melanie Griffith, and Bill Clinton. At the high point of the festivities, Susan McDougal sat on Flynt's lap.

••••••••

THE TOWN OF SOMERSET, MD., located just outside Washington, is populated with the kind of affluent suburbanites who usually frown on those who take handouts from the government. That is, of course, unless the handouts are going to them.

The town had a swimming pool that was supported by membership fees. Then someone figured out that if the pool was turned over to the town, the fees would be paid in the form of town taxes that could be deducted from the federal income tax. At a town meeting where the idea was proposed a few idealists objected that it was wrong to transfer the cost to the average national taxpayer, who was less well-off than the citizens of Somerset. But that argument proved unpersuasive. In fact, the town voted in favor of adding its tennis courts to the package so that they too would be paid for not by the people of Somerset but by the people of the United States.

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BURIED ON PAGE 79 OF THE 616-page second volume of the four-volume annual budget put out by the White House on Feb. 1 was a proposal to tax the investment income of trade associations. What happened next was that the fur—or more precisely the faxes—flew. The trade associations are lobbies. No group is more skilled at expressing indignant opposition. The National Food Processors Association called the proposal "an anti-food safety tax." The U.S. Chamber of Commerce called the tax an attempt by the administration "to punish and silence its critics." "The American Society of Association Executives ... hand delivered a letter to every congressional office urging opposition," reports *The Wall Street Jour-*

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nal's Jacob M. Schlesinger. "'Immediate Action Needed!' the group's website blares in red letters."

Is the proposal that excites so much rage an unreasonable one? What it does is try to eliminate a double tax break. A business gets a deduction when it pays its dues to its trade association. If the association then invests part of that money, it does not now have to pay taxes on the income from the investment. That's the second break. So a tax does not seem at all irrational. "The people who oppose this," outgoing Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin told Schlesinger, "are basically going to be opposing having lobbyists pay their fair share of taxes."

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THIS YEAR THE PEOPLE WHO give out the National Magazine Awards presented one to *Good Housekeeping* for an article on colon cancer and one to *Cigar Aficionado*. Isn't there a contradiction here?

••••••••

FOR YEARS, MOST COAL MINE owners in my home state, West Virginia, have gotten by with only a slap on the wrist for violations of mine safety laws and failure to pay their share of the Workers' Compensation Fund. But last month one got hit with a 32-month prison sentence and a fine of $850,000. My congratulations to U.S. Attorney Rebecca Betts and to Assistant U.S. Attorneys Stephanie Thacker and John File, who prosecuted the case, and U.S. District Court Judge Robert J. Staker who so gratifyingly stuck it to the bad guy.

••••••••

HMOs MAY HOLD DOWN MEDical costs but they can also cheapskate on care and, as Kip Sullivan points out in this issue, endanger privacy. In addition, according to recent studies reported by Dolores Kong of *The Boston Globe*, physicians give less time to providing free medical care and hospitals' research budgets decline. Where competition between HMOs is high, hospital research budgets fall from 6.1 percent to 2.5 percent. And doctors "who received the greatest proportion of their patient care revenues from managed care, 85 percent or more, and worked in markets with the highest managed-care penetration, provided the least amount of free care—only 4.4 hours in the previous month," reports Kong.

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FOR THOSE WHO SUSPECT THAT the big shots in the federal bureaucracy live a softer life than their minions who labor down below, we offer this evidence from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Two of "Inside the Beltway" columnist John McCaslin's sources were recently on the same elevator with a cleaning lady who had "stacks and stacks" of low-cost Scott's toilet paper to deliver to employee restrooms. Another container was identified as Charmin Big Squeeze. They asked where it was going. The answer was the bathroom of NRC chairwoman Shirley Ann Jackson. When NRC employees learned of this outrage, they rebelled. Now everyone is getting the Charmin.

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THE CREDIT CARD COMPANIES are crowing about the bankruptcy bill passed by the House last month. It makes it easier for them to collect from card holders but it does nothing to discourage them from marketing cards to people who don't realize what they're getting into. And the bill maintains the great Republican tradition of solicitude for wealthy crooks. Millionaires can still stiff their creditor by declaring bankruptcy after investing their fortune in palatial homes in Texas or Florida where state law protects residences from creditors no matter how much the home is worth or how little of what is owed is being paid to the creditors.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLvania has established a Center for Human Appearance. What sort of issues do its scholars ponder? A hint is supplied by David Sawyer, one of the Center's psychologists, who recently told *San Francisco* magazine, "Straight men are reluctant to admit they're identifying with gays. But certainly they may be affected by ads where extremely attractive, buff gay men are presented as the masculine ideal."

••••••••

5,000 POUNDS OF PLUTONIUM seem to have been misplaced in what appears to be yet another security lapse by the Department of Energy. The department's explanation to *Newsweek*'s Mark Hosenball, that the 2.5 tons of plutonium may have got "stuck in pipes and manufacturing tools," is less than compellingly persuasive.

DOE has long been a bureaucratic disaster. Between 1980 and 1996 it wasted $10 billion in projects that were canceled before completion, according to a recent GAO report which quoted one expert on the agency saying, "DOE's organization is a mess. You cannot tell who is the boss."

In 1995, Timothy Noah, a *Washington Monthly* alumnus who was then with *The Wall Street Journal*, wrote an article entitled "So What Do People at the Energy Department Do All Day Long?" The answers were not reassuring. "We probably spend half our time doing very routine, almost administrative things like answering mail," said one manager, and attending "meetings on programs over which we have broad oversight, but not a lot of responsibility."

My personal favorite was the answer of Betty Crawford, Total Quality Management Team coordinator in the DOE's Las Vegas office: "She says on a typical day she will 'review any plans that we might be working on with regard to quality. That might include a customer focus plan. It might include plans to get our strategic

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planning going.'" What could lend greater urgency to the day than planning strategic planning?

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AS FOR THOSE MEETINGS "ON programs over which we have broad oversight, but not a lot of responsibility," the reference was doubtless to DOE's contractors who in 1995 had 140,000 employees compared to DOE's 20,000 civil servants. (Remember, the next time some official boasts that the administration has slashed the federal work force, to inquire how many contract employees are working for the agencies that have been supposedly cut back.) Contract employees have staffed Los Alamos, Livermore, Oak Ridge, and Rocky Flats, from which so many of the DOE's recent scandals have emanated.

••••••••

THE NEW YORK TIMES RECENTLY took two laudable steps. It announced that it will no longer print cigarette ads, a step that may have been long overdue but is still worthy of high praise and sets an example I hope other leading papers like *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times* will follow.

The *Times* also announced that it would not have a table at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. If you read the guest list on page 4 of this month's "Tilting," you know that this event has become an embarrassment to the profession of journalism. Publications compete to land celebrities to sit at their table to impress their colleagues and their employers. When the big shots are public figures who are covered by the publications, there are troubling hints that acceptance of an invitation may lead to softer treatment. It was important that an industry leader take a stand against this practice and I congratulate the *Times* for doing so.

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I MAY HAVE MET A PRESIDENT of the United States—I mean a possible future president. His name is Paul O'Neill. He's been the CEO of Alcoa for the last several years. His bottom line skill has been confirmed by the firm's recent strength in the stock market. But he has also been a spectacular success in another area, worker safety, where preoccupation with profit often leads to neglect.

I don't know whether O'Neill has political ambitions, but he's definitely worth a good look. He differs from the conventional businessman in other intriguing ways. He is committed to the goals of providing quality health care for every American and an education that will enable every child to achieve his potential.

These movies teach us that deep emotional satisfaction can come from blowing away our tormentor.

And listen to this, he not only has impressive corporate credentials—he was also president of International Paper—but he has served in government. Not just for a little while but for nearly a decade, first at the Veteran's Administration, where he saw what needed to be done to make one government bureaucracy work, and then as Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget where he had an overview of the entire executive branch. Only Franklin Roosevelt had similar experience. And he turned out to be the greatest president of the 20th century!

If Bill Clinton had known the federal government this well, he might not have been so consistently surprised by its sins. When the media report screw-ups at the CIA, the FBI, ATF, the DOE, and the IRS, Clinton always seems astonished. One would prefer that he had been sufficiently attentive to his duties to have identified some of these scandals when they were only potential scandals and had taken corrective action in time. This, rather than Monicagate or Whitewater, has been my main complaint about his administration.

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SPEAKING OF PEOPLE WHO KNOW about the executive branch, they are as rare among political scientists as among politicians. You would think political scientists would know government, wouldn't you? They do know about policy issues and the White House and Congress but they pay very little attention to the implementation of policy, which after all is where the rubber meets the road. A notable exception is Paul Light, who used to teach at Minnesota and is now at Brookings. His findings often confirm what we've been trying to tell our readers. For example, he recently released a study showing that the Clinton-Gore downsizing had not produced the midlevel cuts advertised and that the number of midlevel employees had, as we reported, actually increased under the present administration. Clinton and Gore were fooled by clever bureaucrats who changed their titles from manager to "management support specialist" and "team leader." Light observes, "There appear to be more team leaders today in government than in all of Little League, Pop Warner football and peewee soccer combined."

••••••••

YOU MAY RECALL ROBERT Worth's recent article on how effective anti-tobacco ads can be in reducing smoking. An example comes from Florida where anti-smoking ads resulted in an 8 percent decrease in teenage smoking and more significantly a 19 percent reduction among sixth-to-eighth

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graders. But Republicans in the state House of Representatives cut out the program's funding entirely. Finally a budget of 40 percent less than last year was passed.

Nationally, only four states have pledged substantial funding for anti-tobacco campaigns. Proposals from the states on how to spend the first $ 24 billion in the massive tobacco settlement, according to *The Washington Post*'s Saundra Torry, "often relegate a tiny share—or even nothing" to efforts to discourage smoking.

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DO MAGAZINES LIKE VANITY FAIR snare celebrities for cover stories by implicitly promising soft treatment? Three years ago, Joshua Wolf Shenk told our readers that they did. Now confirmation comes in an article by Bernard Weinraub in *The New York Times* that describes the work of Pat Kingsley, co-founder of PMK, identified as "the most powerful public relations company in entertainment":

"She shrewdly manipulates and cajoles magazine editors and television executives, and often demands outright that for profiles of her clients they use preferred interviewers (usually ones who are in awe of stars and will ask softball questions) as well as glossy photographers."

••••••••

SPEAKING OF THE STATES, WHEN are they going to begin taking seriously their obligation to keep unsafe trucks off the highways? The April 24 issue of West Virginia's *Charleston Gazette* describes the kind of accident that make my blood boil. A big dump truck carrying several tons of asphalt blew a tire, crossed the center line, and demolished a car driven by a 38 year-old mother. She was killed as were her two children, whom she was taking to a doctor's appointment. "The front tires of the truck were like glass," said state police Sgt. Joe Parsons. "I've never seen tires so bad in my career."

One West Virginia town, Chesapeake, has become so desperate about the state's failure to act against overloaded trucks that it is installing its own scales.

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"AS MANY AS FOUR MILLION Americans with modest incomes may be overlooking an IRS provision aimed at cutting or even eliminating their federal income taxes," reports Curt Anderson of the Associated Press. And the IRS estimates that 40 percent of the people who do claim the earned income tax credit have errors in their returns.

One problem is that the benefit has not been as well-publicized among the working poor as among smart cheats. Also, the poor don't have the money to hire tax professionals to help them deal with the paperwork which includes a 12-question checklist followed by a nine-line worksheet and an eight-line form. "All of this," writes Anderson, "requires constant reference to several pages of Internal Revenue Service instructions."

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BUT THERE IS SOME GOOD NEWS for the poor. The economic boom is at last helping people at the bottom of the ladder. One way this is happening was illustrated by a recent *Wall Street Journal* story from Kansas City where the competition for new employees has become so heated that even traditional exploiters such as day care centers and fast food restaurants have begun to offer health insurance.

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ONE OF THE MOST SHAMEFUL episodes in American history came at the time of the fall of South Vietnam in 1975 when we pulled out, leaving behind thousands of Vietnamese who had sided with us and whose lives were in peril. I had forgotten how much of this shame should be borne by Gerald Ford, who was then president, and Henry Kissinger, his secretary of

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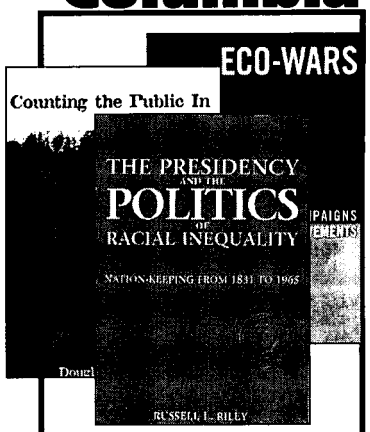

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"Truth may be the first casualty of war."*

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TRUTH TO TELL

NOTES FROM MY WHITE HOUSE EDUCATION

Lanny J. Davis

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coauthor of
All the President's Men

* *U.S. News and World Report*

state at the time, until *The Washington Post* reprinted this story dated April 30, 1975:

"A strongly-worded cable from Washington Tuesday afternoon to U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin in Saigon warned the ambassador that President Ford was becoming irritated with the slow pace at which Americans, in comparison to South Vietnamese, were being evacuated by helicopter from the besieged capital ... The cable in effect forced Martin to stop loading so many Vietnamese and to get the remaining Americans out fast."

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ON LITTLETON, I TEND TO BE in the "all of the above" camp when asked to assign blame to guns, movies, television, video games, the Internet, and the decline in family responsibility for child behavior. But a couple of points seem worth special emphasis. One is that while Japanese kids see the same movies and television that ours do, Japan had only 22 gun deaths last year compared to 15,000 here. Guns are much harder to acquire in Japan and the culture does not encourage the acting out of emotion.

That point I owe to NBC News. The other point I want to make is one I haven't seen elsewhere. It's the danger of glorifying revenge shooting. In the last couple of decades there have been quite a few films that have made us hate the villain so intensely that by the climax we yearn for the hero or heroine to pull the trigger. One even hears people in the theater shout "Shoot! Shoot!" And I'm embarrassed to admit that I've found myself saying the same thing to the television screen in the privacy of my house. I believe there is great danger in these movies. They teach us that deep emotional satisfaction can come from blowing away our tormentor.

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TWO MORE BITS OF NEWS TO make you nervous: If terrorists were to use anthrax against one of our cities, "recognition of the disease would likely be delayed," reports *The Washington Post*, "because doctors are unfamiliar with anthrax and laboratories don't test for it." If the terrorist used a nuclear weapon or there is an accident at another Three Mile Island, doctors won't have the drug, potassium iodine, that reduces the risk of thyroid cancer in people exposed to fallout. The reason, according to Matthew Wald of *The New York Times*, is that is that "the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has quietly backed away from its offer to give states stockpiles of [the] drug." Maybe the fellows at the NRC are too busy fighting the great toilet paper battle.

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YOU WILL NOT BE SURPRISED TO learn that the Pentagon's National Imagery and Mapping Agency is advertising for a public affairs officer to deal with the media and Congress. If you can explain those erroneous maps, you can earn up to $104,851 per year. But the explanations aren't going to be easy. People are asking why the Pentagon, after discovering that a faulty map was a factor in the Italian cable car tragedy, did not verify that its Belgrade maps were accurate. And why, after a decade of trouble with the Serbs, didn't the CIA have enough agents on the ground in Belgrade, or recently enough returned from there, to confirm the current location of important potential targets.

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WHEN WE FIND FAULT WITH the performance of government agencies it is important to acknowledge successes. And what can be more impressive than the accurate tornado warnings given by the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla.? Its pinpointing of the tornado's path saved thousand of lives. One survivor after another expressed gratitude for having been warned in time to save themselves and their children. ●

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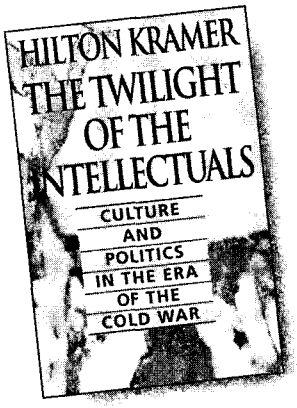

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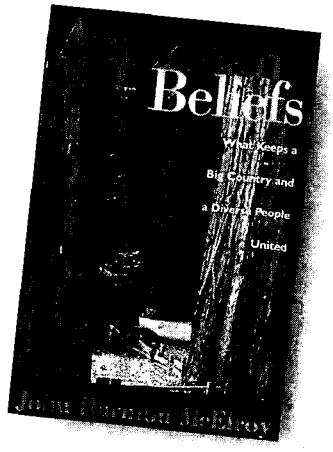

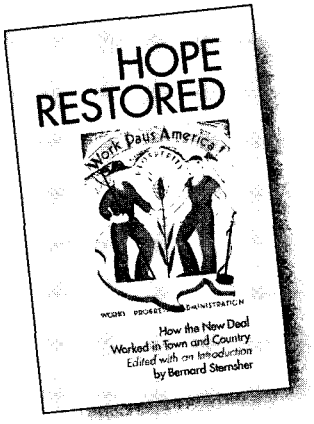

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Rough Trade

How currency traders profited from the Asian meltdown

BY NICK THOMPSON

ON JULY 2, 1997, THAILAND'S PRIME minister, Gen. Chavalit, stood screaming at his Minister of Finance, M.R. Chatu Monkul Sonakul, in his country's National Assembly. M.R. Chatu Monkul had advocated devaluing Thailand's currency for months and today, he argued, devaluation was absolutely necessary. The prime minister was in denial and furious. Thailand had conquered capitalism and, in the previous decade, the kingdom had literally grown as fast as any nation ever had. Paupers had become princes and cars were now clogging roads in towns where shoes had been rare two decades before. Thailand was too strong, too smart, and too successful to fall prey to currency speculation. M.R. Chatu Monkul was fired.

As the now ex-minister of finance left, he mumbled prophetically, "It will fall anyway ... but we won't be able to control it."

The most severe world economic crisis since the depression of the 1930s would begin that afternoon when even Prime Minister Chavalit had to throw in the towel. By the end of the day, Thailand's currency, the baht, was slipping into freefall. It would lose 40 percent of its value within weeks. Soon every other Asian currency would slip down with it and, by the end of the summer, the economies of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand would be plummeting like Icarus. Within a year, the streets in two of the three nations would be on fire.

As this scene exploded in Bangkok, hundreds of young currency traders jabbered into their telephones around the world selling baht to anyone who would buy. Traders wore the same plain blue shirts as the day before and stared into the same blue computer screens. The scene in major companies was intense but not chaotic and the mood was one of satisfaction. Traders had predicted that Thailand would devalue and now they had hit a home run: They were both looking smart and making lots of money.

Traders that day weren't concerned that Thai businessmen were losing everything they had labored for a generation to achieve and that companies were going belly-up. They weren't concerned that losses would trickle down to construction workers in Bangkok, the women who sold pineapples to the workers, and to the peasant families of everyone up to the north. Thailand's currency was collapsing because it merited a collapse. Could it have been that the punishment didn't fit the crime, that Thailand had made mistakes but not enough to merit a collapse, and that the market was overreacting and overshooting?

"I don't believe in overshooting. The market couldn't overshoot in a billion years," said Robert Gray, a former trader with First Interstate. "The market is always right."

Political incompetence, corruption, and economic nonsense contributed greatly to the Asian crisis. Put the government of Thailand on trial for mismanagement and it would be judged guilty. But the more interesting trial would be of capitalism itself and of the trigger of the explosion: currency markets and traders. The traders could plead no contest and be given a slap on the wrist but the market would be judged guilty and sentenced to a stint in reform school.

Riders on the Storm

Currency markets arguably are the most important markets in the world and, with daily transactions exceeding one trillion dollars, they are certainly the largest. There are no regulations and there is no central trading center; it's free market capitalism at its purest—like Wall Street before Black Friday. Unlike the New York Stock Exchange today, collapses don't even trigger automatic shutdown mechanisms. In the

NICK THOMPSON *is co-author of the forthcoming book* The Baobab and the Mango Tree, *on development in Ghana and Thailand.*

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past five years, these markets have kicked over the stones that started avalanches in Mexico, Southeast Asia, and Russia.

The money that flows through these currency markets comes from either speculative or non-speculative sources. Non-speculative sources include exchanges made by multinational businesses that need foreign currency. If McDonald's wants to build a restaurant in central Thailand, it will have to pay the workers in baht. To get the baht, it will have to trade some of the dollars earned selling Big Macs in the United States. If McDonald's is worried about the stability of Thailand it may also want to hedge against the currency's collapse by borrowing baht from a bank and then exchanging this money for dollars (selling baht short). Investors and their funds make up another significant part of the non-speculative market. If I want to buy stock or real estate in Bangkok, I have to change my money as well.

These trades lubricate the gears of international capitalism and, without them, there would not have been the economic boom and globalization of the last generation. If you couldn't freely exchange currencies, McDonald's couldn't open in Bangkok, Nike couldn't make shoes in Indonesia to sell in the United States and, if you wanted to buy miso soup from Japan, you wouldn't go to your local supermarket: You'd have to go to Tokyo and barter. Countries that have closed their economies to these transactions, like much of Africa after independence, have stumbled and slipped into the new world order where no-holds-barred capitalism reigns.

Beyond these business transactions, there is speculation: the purchase of currencies purely to make money. If a trader thinks Brazil's interest rates are going to go up, he (they're almost all men) buys the real. If he thinks that Indonesia's political system is going to crumble, he sells rupiah. No trader pretends that these transactions add value to an economy. These trades are simply about making money, and it is this type of currency trading that now makes Southeast Asian officials steam. A business wants to hold its currencies for years, and a stock investor is likely to at least hold his investment through the short term. A speculator just needs a trade that will last until the market makes its next move—and that can be instantaneous. As John Maynard Keynes famously wrote, "Speculators may do no harm as a bubble on a steady stream of enterprise. But the position is serious when enterprise becomes a bubble on a whirlpool of speculation."

The people who go into currency trading are quite unlike most young people. They are the brightest and the best. They all graduate from college with honors and ambitious dreams. But they also lust for intensity and unpredictability. They crave being called at 3 o'clock in the morning and forced to make a deal. Some have screens displaying currency prices arranged throughout their houses—from the bedroom to the kitchen to the bathroom—just in case they are put into this situation. One currency trader at a major firm glowingly told me of another young rising star.

"He likes to drive a motorcycle and carry a knife in his boot. ... If he's bored on a plane, he's not going to sleep or read a book; he'll flip a coin 5,000 times to see if there is a slight advantage that can be gained by guessing one side or the other."

These are not young money-hungry investment bankers. They like to have their weekends off to dive from mountains or meditate or just live; they want to work 60 hours a week, not the 100 that other graduates who aim to get rich do. It's not a profession for the straight and narrow but it's also not a profession for idealists. Young men and women who want to save the world don't go into markets; they go into medicine or work for non-profits or travel a thousand other roads that don't mandate that *The Financial Times* be gobbled with the morning's orange juice. As another young trader responded when pressed to give a moral justification for his career:

"Look, it's not the Peace Corps."

In fact, almost every trader argues that his profession is a fundamentally amoral one. For every winner in a trade there must by definition be a loser. Even investment bankers can claim to be helping to make companies with good ideas grow. Currency traders know that they would immediately lose their jobs if they started to act on deliberate moral impulses. However, behind this veneer and pride in amorality, there is a sense among traders that they are the disinterested jurors casting out quasi-divine judgment on economies that stray from the road of proper free market economics. To one trader, "we just serve as the thermometer. If a country is sick, we tell him."

In this sense, Southeast Asia was currency traders' Tower of Babel. Ask a trader what happened there and you will be told that the governments of Southeast Asia brought the crisis on themselves through hubris. They let billions of dollars flow unregulated into their country. They didn't scrutinize loans (their friends were the ones getting rich) and they ran huge budget deficits. Malaysia spent billions on glamour projects like trying to build the world's tallest buildings. With this folly, the traders argue, the region's economic boom deserved to be crushed.

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However, even if traders are a bit imperious, they have a case to make that they do benefit the world economy. Bill Jacobson, a trader at a major American bank, said, "even if currency traders had 100 percent control over the economies, which they don't, why would having millions of different people influencing markets through the way they choose to invest their own money be any worse than having a bunch of corrupt bureaucrats in control?"

It wouldn't—if you assume that politicians are corrupt or incompetent, that traders are just benevolent judges of economic guilt and innocence, and that the system works. Of course, not everyone accepts these assumptions. To some of their critics, traders aren't benevolent judges; they're monsters. In the worst case, traders deliberately manipulate currencies for personal gain. According to Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia, the most infamous critic of the profession, "Currency traders have become rich—very, very rich—through making other people poor ... Currency trading is unnecessary, unproductive, and totally immoral. It should be stopped."

Mahathir is both a hypocrite—his country's central bank reportedly lost $6 billion in currency speculation over the last few years—and wrong about the impacts of trading and the motivations of traders (Jacobsen, for one, just wants to earn some money so he can pay for his children's education and move back to a quiet life in western Massachusetts). A more effective argument acknowledges that blaming traders is akin to shooting the messengers. Traders themselves are not the problem; fundamental flaws in 1990s-style capitalism are. Specifically, without regulation or controls, the market is able to run wild, overshoot, and wreak havoc. Even worse, the market can be driven by impulses that evade objective measures of economics and politics.

When currency traders make decisions on whether to buy or to sell, they generally look at three factors: politics, economics, and perceptions. If traders think that economic policy is sound, they are likely to buy that currency. If they think that the political system is going to collapse, they'll sell. These political and economic evaluations are objective, but the third factor, perception, is subjective. If a currency trader thinks that other traders are going to start selling the currency in the near future, he would do well to sell now, regardless of other considerations.

Currencies collapse when a country tries to maintain a fixed currency. In Thailand, up until July of 1997, the government stabilized the currency near 26 baht to the dollar. If there were more sellers than buyers at that price, the government would either raise interest rates (slowing economic growth but making the baht more attractive), or use some of its dollars to buy baht in the open market until the price returned to 26. If there were more buyers than sellers, the policy would be just the reverse.

The trouble with such a policy comes when currency traders perceive that the government will no longer be able to defend the currency, either because of economic weakness or because the government is running out of reserves. From this moment on, there are far more sellers of the currency than there are buyers, and it takes either exorbitant interest rates or more and more dollar reserves from the central bank to maintain the price. Moreover, currency traders who have entered into the market early can push the collapse forward by making public statements about its imminence, giving interviews to *The Wall Street Journal* and intensifying the strong influence that perception has upon price. The scenario runs circles around itself with momentum building until, boom! the currency can drop into oblivion just because every trader thinks that every other trader will soon start unloading.

In the instance of Thailand, there is certainly a case to be made that a collapse was in order. Yet there is a more persuasive argument that the punishment exceeded the crime and that the political and economic problems that contributed to the meltdown were augmented by the ruthlessness of global capitalism.

There were two main problems in Thailand that led to the sudden collapse. First, Chavalit Yongchaiyud, the prime minister of Thailand at the time, had become intoxicated by his country's growth over the past generation. Wherever he ruled, the economy boomed, and gradually Chavalit developed unlimited faith in his own abilities. Because money means more in Thai politics than even in the United States, he became more and more indebted to Thai businessmen (all of whom were bound to take a bath with devaluation). As the currency weakened and sporadic attacks revealed his policy's weakness, Chavalit held on and believed that he could will the currency to stay strong, as Canute did the waves. Currency traders, however, kept pounding, and, like a high pressure hose firing on soft clay, they gradually wore everything away until the baht collapsed.

Second, Chavalit's obstinate position did not encounter adequate opposition because the underlying economic problems in Thailand were almost precisely the opposite of the ones that had caused the collapse in Mexico a few years before, and analysts had not immediately grasped the weaknesses. In Mexico,

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the problem was overconsumption. Billions of dollars had flowed in and been spent on expensive cars and luxury goods. In Thailand, billions of dollars had come in and been invested, and then more had been invested, and then even more had been invested and lent out. This was hardly a problem in standard macroeconomic terms and it wasn't until increased prices and indebtedness had reached crisis proportions that people took notice. Only in July of 1996, one year before the devaluation and well into the cycle, did the IMF first argue that Thailand needed to devalue.

Still, the collapse didn't have to be as brutal or as sudden as it was. The Thai economy was growing at six percent a year, inflation was running at a mere four percent, there was a constitutional reform movement brewing, and even declining indicators were simply coming down from the stratosphere. More importantly, the chinks that had been found in Thailand's economic armor did not justify the panic that quickly hammered the rest of Asia and, almost instantly after the Thai devaluation, sent the high-pressure hose spraying wildly around, overshooting and destabilizing the region. Thailand's currency dropped 40 percent of its value in three weeks and Indonesia's has dropped 80 percent in the past year and a half. This cycle has been repeated in other countries over and over in the past year, and not only could the changes not possibly be justified simply by economic and political changes, they also haven't led to rational political reforms as a currency trader might hope. They happened so fast that people started demanding blood. Indonesia and Russia are approaching anarchy, Malaysia is moving toward totalitarianism, and the Thai system has been thrown into such chaos that fundamental reforms are next to impossible.

Tax 'em

The most commonly offered solution to the problem of currency runs and instability is the creation of a system that revolves around one, or three, stable major currencies. Proponents of this idea range from President Jacques Chirac of France to assorted South American economists. This system would be modeled after the new European economic union. Countries would fix their currencies to the dollar (or to the dollar, euro, and yen) and in this way be able to avoid currency runs, speculation, and the investor uncertainty that comes with potential currency instability.

This solution, however, like all other solutions that keep the value of a currency fixed, is incompatible with two other goals of international policy: free capital mobility and domestic sovereignty over interest rate policies. Countries like to have control over their interest rates so that, when the economy is in recession, rates can be lowered to stimulate growth (lower interest rates make lending and investment easier). However, unless there are capital controls, a country cannot control interest rates while maintaining a fixed currency. If the values of the dollar and the yen were guaranteed at a fixed rate, and the U.S. Federal Reserve raised interest rates even by a fraction of a percent, every investor would immediately be able to make a fortune by borrowing yen at the low interest rate and then buying dollars and lending them out at the high interest rate.

A better solution is an international tax on currency transactions. This idea was originally pushed forward in the early 1970s by Nobel Prize-winning economist James Tobin. A "Tobin tax" would be a very small levy on all international currency transactions. Traders would have to pay the tax to the regular collecting authority of the country in which the transaction originated and the tax revenues would then be sent to the World Bank, IMF, or a yet to be determined international financial agency that would focus on development. A tax of as little as one-tenth of 1 percent on all foreign currency exchanges would easily raise hundreds of billions of dollars a year with current transaction levels and, with a slightly higher tax, revenues could quickly move into the trillions. Countries that try to circumvent the tax and become havens of tax-free currency trading could be denied World Bank loans and international support.

A tax of this level would hardly deter long-term (or even medium-term) investors. If I want to buy a factory in a developing country to hold onto for 20 years, or even two, a levy of one-tenth or one-half of one percent on my currency transaction is unlikely to stop me. It would, however, slow down short-term speculators who try to pounce on tiny movements caused by perception and minuscule spreads and make trades every day. It would surely have dampened some of the chaos in Thailand's currency markets and it would help eventual market outcomes to be determined more by the fundamentals that drive long-term investment than the perceptions that can dominate the short term.

International investors opposed to such a tax make the argument that there would be difficulties in implementation. A Tobin tax, however, would rely on existing infrastructure and governments would also have incentives to make the tax work so that

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their central banks could set interest rate policies based on economic growth, not on potential currency speculation.

Of course, the principal reason that international investors are opposed to a Tobin tax has nothing to do with implementation concerns. Keeping markets completely free has simply become a religion. No regulation is good and no controls are worthwhile. It's not even worth it to have a small tax that would work like the surge protectors that most of us use to protect our computers: draining a little bit of energy all of the time but preventing the whole system from crashing in the event of a storm.

Today, the traders in New York, London, Tokyo, and every other center around the world are still wearing the same blue shirts and staring into the same

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

George W. Bush has been notably vague, some would say even evasive, in his answers to questions on his positions on national issues, especially on foreign policy. But he recently wrote to *New York Times* columnist **William Safire** "I'm going to understand specific areas better and better as time goes on." Texas voters seem equally vague. When asked by a Scripps Howard poll to name Bush's number one accomplishment as governor, 45 percent couldn't come up with an answer.

Most observers have thought **Elizabeth Dole** did a bit better when confronted by similar critics ("Thrown by tough questions, Mrs. Dole demurs on issues" was the May 2 headline in *The Washington Times*). Dole then proceeded to come out for gun control ("I don't think you need an AK-47 to defend your family") and to state that she would not support the constitutional amendment banning abortion that is favored by many conservatives.

Veteran's Affairs Secretary **Togo D. West Jr.**'s use of public funds to lease a black 1999 Cadillac Fleetwood LT has not won applause from the 1106 VA employees whose layoffs he has approved.

Further doubt about **George W. Bush** may be inspired by a Zogby poll reported by Reuters that asked voters which of 11 possible candidates they would support for the Republican nomination. The poll had two parts. One named the candidates. Bush got 47 percent. The other gave biographical descriptions of the candidate but not their names. Bush's vote sank to 24 percent.

Incidently, the Republican candidate who gained the most with his life story was **Gary Bauer**. While his name garnered a measly one percent, his biography got 15 percent.

Congressman **Robert L. Barr Jr.**'s passion for ethics in government, which seemed so high during the hearings on the impeachment of **Bill Clinton**, apparently subsides when the issue is closer to home. It seems that he, according to *The Washington Post*'s **Juliet Eilperin**, "has quietly amended a housing bill for the homeless to give a Cobb County [Ga.] housing group headed by his wife, Jeri, preferential treatment in the way federal funds are handed out."

California Lt. Gov. **Cruz Bustamante**'s public disagreement with Governor **Gray Davis**' decision not to fight Proposition 187's ban on public services for illegal immigrants has produced at least one clear result: The Governor's office has taken back nine parking spaces allotted to the Lt. Governor's staff.

Barbara Feinman Todd was the ghostwriter for **Hillary Clinton**'s *It Takes a Village*. But, she tells *Capitol Style* magazine, the First Lady not only failed to note Todd's efforts in the book's acknowledgments but was responsible for Simon and Schuster's delay in paying the final $30,000 of the $120,000 due Todd. "It's the White House that doesn't want you paid," she was told.

Justice **Antonin Scalia** rarely takes positions that delight the editors of this magazine. But one that did was when he recently, in the words of *The Washington Post*'s **Joan Biskupic**, "chided one lawyer for using the milquetoast 'gaming' instead of 'gambling.'"

The Wall Street Journal's **A. Craig Copetas** recently tracked down **Leku Bojku**,

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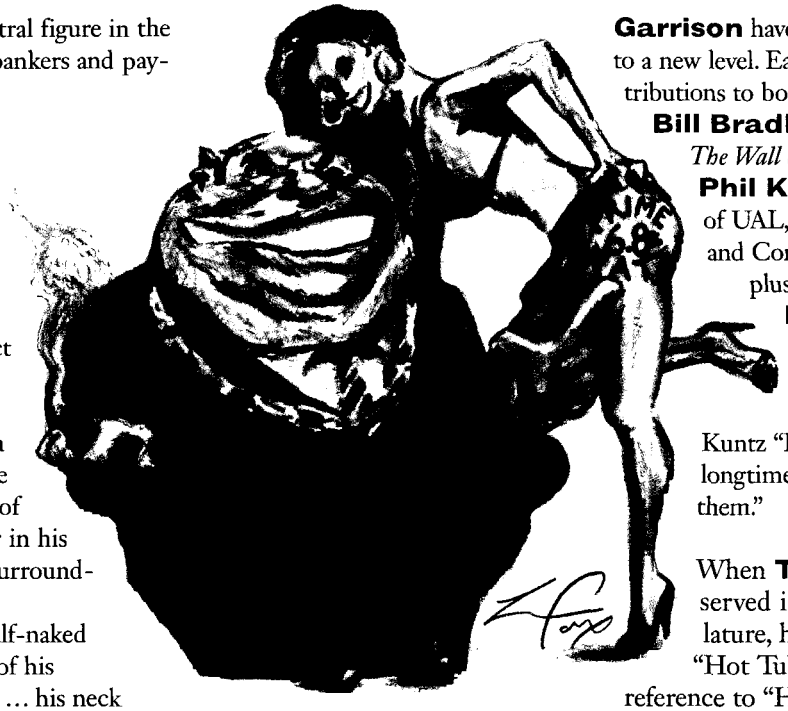
blue computer screens. They are looking for economic weaknesses and looking for the next currency that's going to collapse. If they find a likely suspect, they'll attack it, and if enough speculators start to sell, the perception of weakness might become self-fulfilling. This will continue on and on, with markets around the world sinking like Thailand's. When this happens, the beneficiaries will claim that they were just pointing out weaknesses (just as they did in 1929) and that currency markets are vital to global commerce and to lubricating the gears of global capitalism that have certainly brought prosperity to people all over the world. Their implicit argument, however, will be the notion that global capitalism, like a brothel, works best when there's no regulation. As has been clearly seen in Thailand, that isn't always true.

described as "a central figure in the global network of bankers and paymasters who since last July have furnished the [Kosovo Liberation Army] with some $100 million." Bojku is not your everyday banker. He is in fact a brothel owner. The intrepid Copetas found him "sitting beneath the outstretched claws of a giant stuffed bear in his Espresso Club ... surrounded by two armed bodyguards, five half-naked women, and three of his 'economic advisers' ... his neck draped with a fat gold chain."



During the interview "Bojku puts down his glass of Albanian liquor and straightens the dark glasses perched on his skinhead hairdo" and tells Copetas over the thump of disco music "I'm the head of KLA finances and ready to meet with **Bill Clinton**." Copetas adds that Bojko "lovingly fingers a Beretta pistol for much of the evening" and that "naughty pictures feature prominently on his glow-in-the-dark business cards."

Back to **George W. Bush**. He recently told *The Washington Post*'s **Dan Balz**, "There's too much emphasis on central government." Yet after Littleton, when he came out for background checks for purchasers at gun shows but failed to endorse a bill pending in the Texas legislature that would have required such checks, he explained, according to **B. Drummond Ayres Jr.** of *The New York Times*, "that perhaps Congress should take care of the matter." Hmmm.

One of the advantages law firms have is that different partners can back different political candidates so that whichever wins the firm's interests will be protected. This year six partners of the New York firm of **Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison** have taken this tactic to a new level. Each has made contributions to both **Al Gore** and **Bill Bradley**. So have, notes *The Wall Street Journal*'s **Phil Kuntz**, the CEOs of UAL, Eastman Kodak, and Continential Grain—plus none other than **Eppie Lederer**, a.k.a. **Ann Landers**, who explains to Kuntz "I've been a longtime friend of both of them."

When **Tom DeLay** served in the Texas legislature, he was known as "Hot Tub Tom," a reference to "Hot Tub Heaven," the residence he shared with several other male members. (This is after living in one called "Macho Manor.") We owe this tidbit to *The New Yorker*'s **Jane Mayer**, who also gives DeLay's excuse for skirting service in Vietnam, even though by his own account he was an ardent advocate of the war: "[T]here had been no room for middle-class boys like him, because too many poor and minority youths eager to escape the ghettos had volunteered first." You can just see them elbowing the Texas Republican aside as he desperately struggled to reach the recruiting sergeant's desk.

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The Wrong Answer to Littleton

A few teen criminals belong in prison, but most do not

BY MEGAN TWOHEY

WE'VE ALL BECOME WELL-acquainted with Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two boys who tore through their hallways and classrooms in Littleton, Colo. in April, spraying bullets that left 12 students and one teacher dead. Their pictures were plastered on the covers of most major magazines; their life stories were regurgitated on every local and national news broadcast. Images of the "Trenchcoat Mafia" will linger in the American memory for years to come, reminding us that even adolescents are capable of horrific crimes.

We're less familiar with boys like Ronnie Vera. Last year, Ronnie, 18, entered an Arizona prison. He is serving a 25-years-to-life sentence for two counts of first-degree burglary and one count of first-degree murder. Unlike Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, Ronnie did not kill anyone. He and a friend were caught stealing a bike by a prominent community activist in Tucson. Ronnie turned to run. His friend pulled out a gun and shot and killed the community activist. One year later, a jury convicted both Ronnie and his friend of murder.

Ronnie was 16 at the time. In most cases, youths under age 18 who break the law enter a juvenile court system. Ronnie, however, stood trial before an adult criminal court. He received an adult sentence, and currently lives behind bars in an adult prison. "From 16 on, he grew up really fast," said Yolanda Vera, Ronnie's mother.

Ronnie is not alone. In its zeal to protect us from cold-blooded teen killers, Congress is now considering sweeping new legislation that threatens to put thousands of relatively harmless kids into adult jails. The trend is already well underway at the state level: From 1992 to 1995, 40 states and the District of Columbia passed laws making it easier for juveniles to be tried as adults. Some state legislatures did so by lowering the juvenile cut-off age—in some cases to age 16 or 17, in others, to age 14. As a result, an estimated 180,000 cases involving 16- or 17-year-olds were tried in criminal court because young defendants were defined as adults under state law in 1994. States also enacted legislation to lengthen the list of crimes that, if committed, exclude a young offender from the juvenile system. Many youths are now automatically transferred to adult court for prosecution for violent crimes and drug offenses, even though federal studies show that older inmates tend to beat and rape teens serving in adult facilitities.

If these policies were merely the price we had to pay to keep our streets safe from monsters like Dylan, they might be forgiveable. But the statistics suggest that the new laws are simply creating more hardened young criminals. Three studies conducted in New York, Florida, and Minnesota compared the cases of young defendants who entered juvenile court systems to those who entered adult criminal courts. In all three studies, youths who entered adult systems had higher recidivism rates than their juvenile system counterparts (that is, they were more likely to be rearrested).

Youths who enter adult systems are not only more likely to commit more crimes; they also tend to receive lesser sentences. Ohio and Illinois studies found that juveniles serving "adult time for adult crime" were released earlier in non-murder cases than

MEGAN TWOHEY *is an intern at* The Washington Monthly.

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those in juvenile systems. Whatever the flaws of the juvenile justice system, the current effort to "get tough" by treating teenagers like adults has only made things worse.

Thirst for More O.J.

When Eric and Dylan went on their bloody killing spree, TV station helicopters hovered over the school grounds, feeding live images of the carnage to households nationwide. The violent rampage came on the heels of last spring's junior high massacre in Jonesboro, Ark.: Two boys, age 11 and 13, unleashed gunfire on their classmates, killing four students and one teacher. In August, *The News Hour With Jim Lehrer* devoted a segment to juvenile crime after two Chicago boys, ages 7 and 8, were charged with killing an 11-year-old-girl.

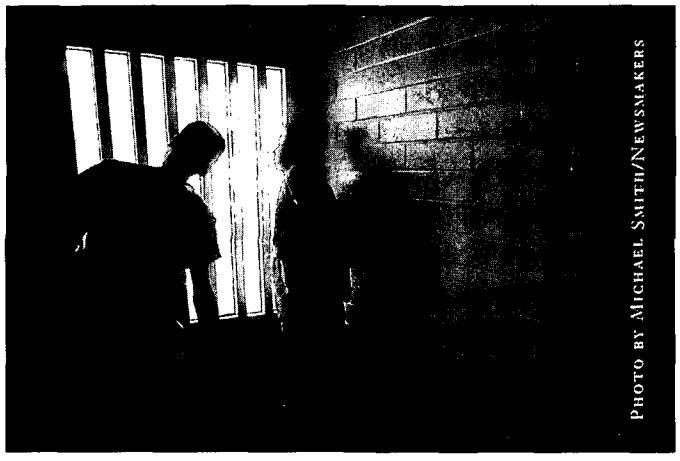
PHOTO BY MICHAEL SMITH/NEWSMAKERS

State and federal legislators pounce on such stories when crafting legislation geared towards juvenile offenders. They are motivated, in large part, by the public's perception—or rather misperceptions—of juvenile crime. Over the past several years, the national media have sensationalized a series of unusual juvenile crime cases, feeding them to a public hungry for post-O.J. Simpson crime dramas.

Such unusually brutal murder cases came on the heels of sociology studies conducted a few years ago that predicted a wave of violent crime led by ruthless teen "superpredators." In 1994, the National Center for Juvenile Justice in Pittsburgh linked arrest rates with the growth of America's juvenile population to predict that murders and other violent juvenile crime rates would double between 1992 and 2010.

As a result, images of juvenile "superpredators" are cemented in the American mind. Not surprisingly, two-thirds of Americans polled in 1998 believed juveniles under age 13 who commit murder should be tried as adults, and a quarter of registered voters polled in 1999 thought juveniles 12 or younger who commit violent crimes should be tried as adults.

Few realize that the sociologists' predictions have not proved true. In fact, the most recent national crime statistics appear to refute the "superpredator" myth. The juvenile violent crime arrest rate declined 23 percent from 1994 to 1997. Juvenile arrests for murder declined 39 percent between 1993 and 1997, and the rate for aggravated assault declined 16 percent from 1994 through 1997. The decrease in crime reported to police in 1998 suggests that juvenile crime rates are continuing to drop, explains Mike Males, author of *Framing Youth: Ten Myths About the Next Generation.*

Yet there is a strong incentive for politicians to keep using the superpredator myth, explains Howard Snyder of the National Center for Juvenile Justice in Pittsburgh. "People naturally have this pessimism about what's going to happen, especially with kids," he says. "If you predict the future's going to be terrible, you're in a win-win situation. If it does happen, you were right. If it doesn't, your raising the flag of concern helped turn it around."

Most "juvenile offenders are not guilty of repeated or random acts of serious violence," Princeton professor John Dilulio argued in a 1997 *New York Times* op-ed piece. "Most kids who get into serious trouble need adult guidance. And they won't find suitable role models in prison."

Dululio is right. A minority of juveniles should be locked up because they demonstrate violent adult behavior. But behind the statistics listed above lie some kids like Yazi Plentywounds. Yazi, a 17-year-old Native American, is serving time in the North Idaho Correctional Institution. When charged with breaking into a convenience store and stealing cases of beer in 1997, Yazi pled guilty and was sentenced to six months at adult boot camp. Yet soon after, he was caught stealing again—a couple cans of beer. Because Yazi had committed offense number two, an Idaho judge slapped a three-year sentence on him and sent him to state prison.

Craig Parish, Yazi's lawyer, reports that his client receives only a small portion of the treatment someone his age needs, such as education or alcohol dependency programs. "This is a smart kid," Parish says. "Yazi

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says, over and over, that he wants to finish his high school education. Based on my knowledge of the Cottonwood prison, the only thing I think they will teach him is how to become a smarter and tougher criminal."

Ironically, the kinds of problems juveniles face in adult systems led to the creation of the first juvenile court 100 years ago. Before Illinois established the nation's first juvenile court in 1899, kids caught stealing or fighting appeared in criminal court alongside adults. Their sentences tended to be too harsh or too lenient; juries had to chose between letting young defendants off the hook or sending them to be beaten and raped in adult prison. For that reason, police, state prosecutors, and the Chicago Bar Association joined Jane Addams and other Progressive reformers to press for separate juvenile courts that could punish teenagers in more appropriate ways.

Once established, juvenile courts developed their own vocabulary. Youths were "delinquents," not defendants. Judges used the term "adjudicated" instead of found guilty. "Dispositions" replaced sentences. Juvenile detention centers sprang up as alternatives to jail. And at the heart of this new system was a goal: to steer young people away from future trouble rather than to punish them for past mistakes.

A century later, politicians struggle to craft one-size-fits-all juvenile policies aimed at delivering juveniles back to the adult courts from which they were once plucked—with some of the most misguided efforts occuring at the federal level.

The Federalization Frenzy

In February, an American Bar Association (ABA) task force headed by former Attorney General Edwin Meese released a strongly-worded report lambasting Congress for federalizing criminal laws in order to appear tough on crime. Meese, who served as attorney general under Ronald Reagan, points to the hypocrisy of conservatives who push for such federalization while trumpeting the virtues of a smaller federal government. In a 1996 *Policy Review* article Meese wrote, "Some of the usual defenders of constitutional limitations on the federal government seem to lose perspective when crime is the issue."

Although the most recent Congress introduced close to a thousand bills that dealt with criminal statutes, the task force highlighted specific legislative initiatives for criticism. It pinpointed as especially unnecessary and dangerous "proposals to enhance federal law regarding juvenile crime—an area long at the center of state criminal justice legislation and an area in which most states have recently toughened their laws." In a letter to the task force, New York District Attorney William Murphy wrote that "[w]e do not need FBI help in investigating a youth bringing a gun to school." James Pollard of the National District Attorneys Association agrees. "The push to federalize juvenile law is dangerous," he says. The federal system "is not geared to take care of juvenile criminals. It has no juvenile prosecutors, juvenile probation officers or psychologists."

Yet federal legislators are demanding more juvenile justice authority. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Senator Jeff Sessions (R- Ala.) are currently fighting to pass a punitive juvenile crime bill. If they succeed, some juveniles tried in adult court would be subject to mandatory sentencing guidelines, which have boosted average prison sentences by close to 35 percent in the past decade, and made nonviolent offenders far more likely to serve a prison term. Hatch and Sessions' legislation also calls for states to abandon judicial discretion—juvenile judges' power to decide whether a young defendant should remain in juvenile court or be sent to the adult system—in favor of prosecutorial discretion. If enacted, their bill permits prosecutors and the U.S. Attorney General to make the decision whether to charge a juvenile offender as an adult. The Senate already passed an amendment to the bill that gives states $50 million for prosecuting juveniles.

Representative Bill McCollum (R.-Fla.) also promotes putting more power in state prosecutors' hands. But look at McCollum's home state, Florida—one with prosecutorial discretion—and you will understand how dangerous such a power shift can be.

Consider Anthony Laster. Anthony, age 15, is both mentally disabled and hearing impaired. In December, he reached into a classmate's pocket and stole two dollars in lunch money in his West Palm Beach junior high school. Thanks to a "zero tolerance" policy, school officials had to report the incident to the police even though Anthony had no previous criminal record and was not armed. Soon afterward, Florida prosecutor Barry Krischer stepped in and filed three felony charges against Anthony in adult court: strong-arm robbery, extortion and petty theft. The young man was facing the possibility of a 30-years-to-life sentence.

He spent three weeks in a detention center. On Christmas Eve, the judge in the adult court set bond at $5,000, the minimum level for felony charges. Because Anthony's family could not raise $500 in bail money, Anthony spent the next four weeks, Christmas included, in county jail.

Unlike the majority of juvenile cases, Anthony's

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made headlines. In fact, Krischer dropped the case after a *60 Minutes* crew arrived in town to investigate. But before the cameras arrived, Krischer had a promotional field day with the case. Krischer explained his charges in a letter to *The Palm Beach Post*. Describing Anthony as "this schoolyard bully, this mugger," Krisher explained that to treat "this forcible felony, this strong-arm robbery, in terms as though it were no more than a two dollar shoplifting fosters and promotes violence in our schools." There is, however, no way pick-pocketing translates into strong-arm robbery. Using such harsh language that fails—perhaps intentionally—to distinguish real safety threats from petty theft is reckless and does not serve the public interest. (It may, however, serve the needs of prosecutors, whose success rates are measured by their conviction rates.) Krischer's actions speak even louder than his words. His office filed adult charges against more than 600 juveniles last year alone.

Most juveniles in Florida do not have such good luck as did Anthony. And, with McCollum, Hatch and Sessions shaping the criminal justice agenda in Congress, many more juveniles nationwide are likely to end up in the hands of state prosecutors and behind bars in adult prison.

Finding the Right Prescription

Make no mistake: Ronnie Vera's friend who pulled the trigger and killed the community activist should serve "adult time for adult crime." But he and other violent youth are a minority, and should be treated as such. Lawmakers at the state and federal levels should avoid basing their reform campaigns on unusual and sensationalized cases like Littleton and Jonesboro, and pay more attention to cases like Anthony Laster's.

Taking such a level-headed approach, however, is not easy, and most pols don't make the effort. As a result, young offenders like Ronnie Vera are locked up for 25-years-to-life, and adolescents with substance abuse problems like Yazi Plentywounds graduate from prison instead of high school. In fact, most juveniles who end up in adult court are repeat drug offenders. Between 1986 and 1995, there was a 180 percent increase in the number of juvenile drug offense cases waived into adult court, and the number of arrests for drug abuse violations increased from 1996 to 1997 for both juveniles and adults. Turning adolescent drug offenders into hardened criminals in prison will not make our streets safer. Nor will setting uniform legal standards that are apt to be too lenient on persistently violent juveniles.

What will? One approach, adopted by over a dozen states, has been to apply blended sentences to juvenile offenders. In Minnesota, judges hand out adult sentences to juvenile offenders, but suspend them while the youth go into juvenile detention programs. The judges then review the juvenile's progress and can reduce the sentence at a later date. In Connecticut, prosecutors can initiate blended proceedings in juvenile court for repeat offenders. The judge imposes both sentences if the juvenile is found guilty but suspends the adult sentence if the juvenile behaves.

Unlike the pending federal legislation, which provides a one-size-fits-all approach to juvenile crime, blended sentencing avoids delivering kids who've made foolish mistakes to adult prisons. It also ensures that those who are beyond hope receive the punishment they deserve. After a century of juvenile justice reform, it's time we stopped paying so much attention to horror stories like Littleton and more to what works.●

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Inside the Globe

A tabloid reporter who taped his bosses tells all

By Jeffrey Scott Shapiro

Brian Williams, the Globe's executive editor, told me they would start me out at $150 a day and rent me a brand new car and an apartment. At age 23, I didn't hesitate. "When can you leave?" Williams asked me. I considered my financial situation and said, "How about two hours?"

It was March 1997, and my destination was Boulder, Colorado—home of JonBenet Ramsey, the angelic six year-old who had been found sexually molested and murdered three months earlier. The *Globe* and its fellow tabloids had been covering the case obsessively, convinced that this was the story that would reverse their decline in circulation—especially if they could finger the killer.

Before I left the *Globe*'s concrete fortress—guarded by a golden statue of Atlas, secured by glass doors, electronic key cards, and hovering video-cameras—there was one last detail. After leaving the room, Williams returned with a contract which contained a confidentiality agreement prohibiting me from revealing information about their methods of information gathering. If I violated it, the penalty was $20,000 for "each and every violation." Williams didn't say anything, but his smile read, *We've got you.*

I arrived in Boulder a few days later, where I met my contact, Craig Lewis. Lewis was a general editor for the *Globe* and had been the *National Enquirer*'s star reporter during the Simpson case in Los Angeles. Immediately, Lewis explained how he planned to use the same methods that had worked for tabloid reporters during the Simpson trial—payoffs to housekeepers and police secretaries, and finding friends of the accused who would betray them. Already, the *Globe* had been villified for publishing stolen crime-scene photos, including one of JonBenet's lifeless hand hanging off the coroner's stretcher.

It didn't take me long to develop a relationship with Boulder's District Attorney, Alex Hunter, as well as the Boulder Police Department's lead detective, Steve Thomas. Occasionally, I discovered a few facts that could be transformed into big headlines with the help of phrases like, "cops probe," "sources say," and "investigators' shocking new scenario." I soon realized that the tabloids could write virtually any story they wanted to as long as someone with authority would say it was possible. In fact, when real information was scarce, my editors would often ask me to engage Hunter or Thomas in a conversation just to lure them into saying, "Yeah, you never know, anything's possible, man." With that, add a pinch and a dash of what Lewis called "Tabloid Magic," and the investigators were considering a shocking new scenario.

Sometimes it wasn't so easy. Occasionally, even Hunter and Thomas didn't want to admit that certain possibilities were within the realm of reality. That's when Lewis turned to his "sources," which consisted of a former prosecutor who loved getting his name in the papers and a former police detective who was sour with his department. For a couple of C-notes a week, both of these characters would allow the *Globe* to use them as "sources." In other words, the *Globe* fabricated quotes and scenarios and then got the OK from their "sources," who would concede they were "possible," and boom! The next *Globe* cover story emerged.

I soon became aware of some of the *Globe*'s other methods of obtaining stories. My own techniques with law enforcement had been to bring them information, unconditionally, with hopes for an occasional reward. Others, however, had no such patience. "Call every one of these numbers and just ask them if they're interested in talking to me," one editor told me as he handed me a list of sheriff's deputies who worked in the Boulder county jail. He was hoping one of them

Jeffrey Scott Shapiro *worked for the* Globe *from 1997 to 1999. He is currently working on a documentary about tabloids.*

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would be willing to give the *Globe* a heads up as to when the Ramseys would be arrested. "Why would anyone want to risk their job by talking to a tabloid?" I asked. Because I could buy them a brand new Mercedes, responded the editor. On another occasion two *Globe* reporters went to the home of a handwriting expert in Evergreen, Colo. with $30,000 in cash, in an effort to get a copy of the ransom note the Ramseys had discovered on the morning of the crime. The expert refused and later called the Jefferson county D.A. with a complaint of "commercial bribery."

In fact, the *Globe* has even been accused of creating stories when it can't find them. In January the *National Enquirer* published a story alleging that the *Globe* paid a former flight attendant $250,000 to lure sportscaster Frank Gifford into having sex in a hotel room outfitted with a video camera. The *Globe* tried to block publication of the story, both denying the charges and arguing that it revealed a "trade secret": how much it pays sources.

Sometimes the targets of these tactics fought back. Another *Globe* reporter tried to get an interview from JonBenet's former physician about allegations from "sources" claiming the doctor had conspired with the Ramseys to conceal a history of sexual abuse in the family. When the physician refused, the reporter wrote the doctor a letter making it clear that without an interview, the *Globe* would be forced to print the criminal allegation against him. The doctor promptly reported the incident to the Boulder police department.

One day an editor pulled out a stack of papers. "I'm going to send you to these places," he said. "It's where John Ramsey used to shop. I want you to interview employees about what he bought and what they know." I asked him how he knew where Ramsey shopped and he told me the papers in his hand were copies of Ramsey's private credit card records, which the *Globe* had obtained from hackers who earned a pretty penny for running such errands. After I discovered nothing unusual, the editor "anonymously" turned the documents over to a police detective whom he was trying to develop as a source, in hopes that the cop would return the favor.

Since the police would need a warrant to obtain such material, I realized that the effect of this maneuver was to violate John Ramsey's Fourth Amendment right protecting him from illegal search and seizure.

I also began to realize that law enforcement and the media had much to gain from one another. When detectives knocked down a wall in the Ramsey home to find any hidden evidence, I made an offer to the D.A.'s office on behalf of my editors to buy the house, which was on the market for a cool million, and then turn it over to the cops so they could smash it up as much as they wanted. D.A. Hunter considered the offer but then decided his men had finished their work anyway.

Presumed Guilty

The tabloids weren't alone in their suspicion that John Ramsey had killed his daughter. Early in the investigation, Ramsey's defensive attitude alienated even one of his close friends, and the early press reports hinted at Ramsey's guilt. But the mainstream media never attacked Ramsey as fiercely or implicated his family as ruthlessly as the tabloids did. The *Globe* actually published a cover story fingering JonBenet's 11 year-old brother as the killer, and another one titled "Daddy Abused JonBenet's Sister: Ramsey Girl Was Killed Before She Could Tell."

Why? Part of it had to do with the fact that most British tabloid writers hail from the working class, and have a deep-rooted resentment of the elite. Joe Mullins, a soft-spoken British editor who worked with me on the Ramsey case, was typical in this respect. Joe was a nice guy, but anyone rich or famous—like the Ramseys—was fair game to him. In time, the *Globe* would begin to remind me of the *Banner* newspaper in Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*. Like the *Banner*, the *Globe*'s editorial department delusionally believed they were social avengers appeasing the mass-

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es by humiliating the aristocracy.

In August 1997, just as the rest of the media began to ease up on Ramsey, the *Globe* sent me to his hometown of Okemos, Mich., to investigate his background. After looking through his high school yearbook, I was able to reach 20 former classmates, including two former girlfriends. From them, I learned that Ramsey's taciturn manner—which had made him seem more suspect—was just a harmless character trait that had been with him all along.

Upon returning from my trip and reporting my findings to D.A. Hunter, I asked him: "Do you really think that John Ramsey is all the things the tabloids say he is?" Hunter shook his head. Then I called Detective Steve Thomas and asked him why he had never sent anyone to Okemos. "Because that's not where we're looking," he said. Then he added, "Jeff, you shouldn't believe what you read in the tabloids."

When I returned to Boulder in September, I tried telling my editors that John Ramsey was no longer regarded as a key suspect. They told me to shut up. Later, when I began investigating the "intruder theory" by conducting interviews with police suspects other than the Ramseys, I was told that I was compromising the *Globe*'s legal future. It became clear to me then that without an indictment against the Ramseys, the *Globe* could be facing a ruinous libel lawsuit.

The following month the *Globe*'s editor, Tony Frost, came to Denver to speak at a panel discussion at the Colorado Press Association Convention. Later, while having a beer with me in the hotel bar, he confessed that Lou Smit, D.A. Hunter's lead investigator, who believed both parents were innocent, was causing him concern. "This Smit thing worries me," Frost told me. "You realize if the Ramseys are really innocent, we're finished." "Who?" I asked. "All of us!" he exclaimed with a whisper. "Every single last one of us ... there *must* be an indictment."

It is of course still possible that Patsy Ramsey will be indicted. It was she, after all, who enrolled JonBenet in those eerie child beauty pageants. But most informed observers doubt that the prosecution has enough evidence to persuade a jury that she is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. And whatever happens to Patsy, John Ramsey could still have a libel case against the *Globe* for what it has said about him. And the fact would remain that the tabloids' methods have seriously distorted the pursuit of justice in this matter.

Under Pressure

In the late spring of 1998, I heard about a journalism professor at the University of Colorado named Michael Tracey who was making a documentary about how the tabloids had corrupted the judicial process in the Ramsey case. *Globe* editor Joe Mullins forbade me to call Tracey under any circumstances, but I did anyway. When I told Tracey that I felt John Ramsey had been wronged by the tabloids, he started a crusade to bring me out from the dark side and join his fight against the tabs.

One night I made an unusual phone call. "Hello?" the voice asked. "Mr. Ramsey?" I said. He asked me who I was and I told him I was just a guy who wanted to tell him he felt sorry for what he was going through, and that I believed he was innocent. He thanked me. When I told him who I was, and that I felt bad for having been involved with the tabs, he told me it was okay, and not to worry about it. One week later I called him back. "Does it hurt your feelings when the tabloids say the things they say about you?" I asked him. "It hurts whenever anyone ... says something that isn't true," he responded.

That summer I found myself contemplating Tracey's offer to help vindicate John Ramsey by working with him on his documentary. But I was plagued by thoughts of the confidentiality agreement I had signed. Still, it didn't take long for me to make up my mind. Instead of attacking the tabs publicly, I decided I would work undercover, gathering as much information as I could about the *Globe*'s methods.

One day *Globe* editor Joe Mullins told me he had information leading him to believe that now-former Detective Steve Thomas' mother had killed herself. (Thomas had just retired from the Boulder police department.) "I'm not sure this is even a story for us. But it's something I thought I might use to get an interview with him, you know?" said Mullins. I was stunned. "How so?" I asked. "Well, I'm sure he wouldn't want it published, would he?" Two days later, he had an excuse to use it, after Tony Frost berated us all for not being aggressive enough about getting new information. "Maybe we're not being clever enough about how we get to people," said Frost in one conversation. "Steve Thomas, maybe we're not being clever enough there." Craig Lewis replied: "This thing about Thomas' family that Joe and I are [sic] talking yesterday ... we kinda decided that was the best way to get into him. It's sort of a situation of backing him into a corner, in a nice way."

That night I found myself in front of Steve Thomas' house in my car, waiting for him to come home.

When I told Thomas to watch out for *Globe* reporters, he was surprised, since he had already declined tabloid offers of as much as $100,000 to give an interview. "They know about your mother," I told

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him. Thomas became concerned. "My *mother*?" he asked, amazed. "Yeah," I said. "What about my mother?" he asked angrily. "They know that she killed herself," I told him. "And they're going to use that to try and force you into talking to them." Thomas was speechless.

Two days later when Craig Lewis told me he was going forward with his plan, I left a letter on Thomas' doorstep warning him. The next morning, Thomas received a Federal Express package which included pictures of his dead mother. According to Margaret Miller, Thomas' lawyer, a *Globe* staffer told Thomas the paper had information that his mother, who died when he was six years old, had committed suicide—an allegation she calls a lie. "He was devastated," Miller told *The Washington Post*.

I soon realized the tabloids could write virtually any story they wanted as long as someone with authority would say it was possible.

Within a week both Lewis and I received letters from Thomas' attorney. To my surprise, she not only accused Lewis of blackmail, she accused me too. When I called her in confusion she said "it was obvious" that I "was working in collusion with Mr. Lewis." I was stunned and hurt. But perhaps I shouldn't have been, given that I was still working for the *Globe*—and I knew as well as anyone how devious it could be.

In late September, I gave a brief interview to *Newsweek* confessing my belief that John Ramsey was innocent. Frost called me into his office at once. "I didn't bring you back here to yell at you," said my editor. "I brought you here to educate you." Frost explained to me that the world is a dirty place and that in the end no one is really trustworthy. People only use others, and never really help them. Honesty and honor are illusions. Frost grinned as he looked at me across his desk. "You think the Ramseys are your friends?" he asked. He shook his head. "The Ramseys aren't *your* friends ... no." As I left his office, Frost added: "All these people, they'll come to you and tell you how great you are. But they just want to use you."

Taking on the Tabs

It was time to start fighting back. One morning in October I found myself in the Denver Federal Building, sitting across from three federal agents who listened to my story of the *Globe*'s attempt to pressure Steve Thomas. They were intrigued by it, and immediately began discussing whether or not they could convince the U.S. Attorney's Office to go after a media organization, since such pursuits were often public relations disasters. One of the agents suggested a sting operation to get the blackmail attempt on tape.

"Don't worry about that," I told them. "Why?" they asked. I opened my briefcase and pulled out a tape I had made with the telephone recording device *Globe* had bought me over a year before. "Because I've already got it on tape," I told the agents. "I've been taping them for months now."

To my surprise, days later, I learned that Steve Thomas had rejected the FBI's offer to investigate the *Globe* on his behalf. Without a victim, the government was powerless to move forward and the matter was dropped. Thomas' attorney, Margaret Miller, told *The Washington Post* that he "was tired of the Ramsey case and wanted to be left alone."

My guess was that Thomas was frightened of the *Globe*. The tabs are notoriously vicious to people who cross them. When Liz Taylor sued the *Enquirer* for $20 million plus punitive damages for falsely accusing her of "drinking up a storm," they didn't back off, but instead ran an even harsher story about her on the cover the next week. You'll notice that certain famous people get savaged in the tabloids all the time. Why? Often it's because they've taken a stand against the tabs, while others have agreed to work with them in exchange for freedom from such humiliations. Some celebrities actually make explicit arrangements, agreeing to fork over information about other celebs in exchange for complete protection from tabloid humiliation. In the trade, these people are known as "untouchables."

The tabs also have their own investigators, as I discovered while researching earlier efforts to fight them. A journalist named Rod Lurie, who wrote a magazine story on the tabs 10 years ago, suffered an incredible series of threats and intimidation. His phone records were illegally seized and his editors were threatened. In the article, Lurie exposed an *Enquirer* reporter for falsely reporting a celebrity to Child Protective Services for abuse when they came up dry with their sources. Despite the fact that it was a false allegation,

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the agency was required by law to respond to the tip with an investigation. When they did, the *Enquirer* got their story. When the reporter was exposed, he wasn't fired or forced out of the business. In fact, the reporter was Brian Williams, the *Globe* executive editor who had initially hired me (not to be confused with Brian Williams of NBC).

Still, I decided that taking on the tabs was worth the risk. In mid-January, I delivered my tapes to CBS' "48 Hours" via Professor Michael Tracey. By the time Frost found out it was too late. "I'm very disappointed in you Jeffrey," he told me. The feeling was mutual, I told him. Although the story hit the wire after Howard Kurtz wrote about it on the front page of *The Washington Post*'s Style section, what must have really burned Frost was his own words about his personal vendetta against the Ramseys. When the tapes played on "48 Hours" Frost heard himself say the kinds of magic words that make libel suits winnable: "The *Globe* and Tony Frost in particular, have more reason to go for the Ramseys," he said, "than the police have!" After I had worried for two years about saying something that would suggest a malicious intent against the Ramseys, it was Frost himself who ended up saying it.

Of course, the *Globe* could still try to sue me for violating the confidentiality contract I signed. But my guess is that they don't want to hear Frost's words played back in a courtroom. Nor would they relish hearing the other 75-odd hours of tapes, which reveal a great deal about the tabloids' methods of information-gathering.

For the moment, protected behind those electronic key card doors and surveillance cameras in a concrete fortress, Frost still reigns over the *Globe*. Sometimes I wonder if he's right about the world being a place where no one is really trustworthy, where honesty and honor are illusions. But I suspect that those words do apply to the world of the tabloids. And as for that world, I hope Frost was being prophetic when he told me: "We're finished ... all of us ... every single last one of us." ●

The Washington Monthly

Journalism Award

APRIL 1999

MERRILL GOOZNER

"Third World Battles for AIDS Drugs"

The Chicago Tribune

It is no secret the AIDS epidemic is taking its steepest toll in the poorest regions of the world. And while there have been significant strides in treating HIV + patients, cutting-edge medication is priced out of reach for the vast majority of AIDS sufferers. Some third world countries have tried to bridge this gap by licensing local firms to manufacture low-cost generic versions of patented anti-AIDS drugs. The World Trade Organization allows countries to provide these licenses if it is done to combat a national emergency. But as Merrill Goozner points out in his well-researched and hard-hitting piece, pharmaceutical companies, fearing a drop in profits, have lobbied the U.S. government to retaliate against countries allowing for cheaper manufacture of AIDS medication. The Clinton administration has been succumbing to the pressure, reports Goozner, pushing countries to repeal their licensing laws. As a result, thousands of disease sufferers around the world could be forced to go without treatment that could keep them alive.

THE MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including two copies of the article or broadcast text) to The Washington Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Or e-mail us at **editors@washingtonmonthly.com**. Nominations for stories run in May are due June 1.

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The Man Behind Ventura

Electing an improbable candidate without money or mudslinging

BY ALEXANDRA STARR

"Most political advertising is like shit," proclaims a flyer for Bill Hillsman's ad agency. "Ours is like manure ... it makes things grow." An unusual way to put it, perhaps, but it's hard to quibble with the analogy. If you own a television, you probably regard political commercials as the equivalent to paying taxes: It's one of the prices you pay for living in a prosperous democracy. Hillsman, whose quirky ads helped catapult long-shots Jesse Ventura and Paul Wellstone into political office, has shown it doesn't have to be that way. "Instead of doing ads that drive people from the room," says Hillsman, "we put together ads that get people to call out, 'Hey, get in here! That ad is on again.'"

We can safely assume lots of Minnesotans were called into living rooms to see Hillsman's cutting-edge commercials for former pro-wrestler Ventura. In one of the biggest electoral upsets of the century, a man who once displayed a penchant for glitter tights and feather boas defeated two of the Gopher state's most established politicians. It was the second time Hillsman's fingerprints were on a come-from-behind win: In 1990, he helped left-winger Wellstone depose incumbent Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, despite being outspent seven-to-one. Hillsman's handiwork not only helped get his guys elected; it also drew more people to the polls. In Jesse's gubernatorial election, 60.1 percent of Minnesota's eligible citizens voted, the state's highest turnout in a non-presidential year since 1982.

In the process of contributing to improbable victories, Hillsman has laid waste to some of the basic shibboleths of political consulting. Most consultants put the cost of a political campaign in the stratosphere, but Jesse and Wellstone were elected on shoestring budgets. Political handlers say negative advertising can be the best way to energize your voter base. But Hillsman generally keeps his spots clean, and when he makes pointed criticism about the competition, he cloaks the message in humor, so the ad doesn't leave a bitter aftertaste. And rather than aiming to "activate" traditional voter groups in the Ventura campaign, Hillsman lured a new demographic to voting booths. Eighteen to 24-year-olds registered and cast ballots in record numbers in the 1998 race, despite the fact they are traditionally one of the groups least likely to vote.

While Ventura's victory prompted an interest in the wunderkind behind the commercials, Hillsman doesn't expect consultants to take a leaf from his creative, shoot-from-the-hip approach. "The same thing happened after the Wellstone campaign," he says. "I hate to sound like a fatalist, but the system is so rigged towards expensive, poll-driven advertising that I don't think things are going to change." Some political watchers, however, are less pessimistic. As Paul Taylor, executive director of the Alliance for Better Campaigns points out, the dirty little secret about political ads is that they are becoming less effective, while the cost of campaigns paradoxically keeps spiraling up. Hillsman's ability to win elections without bankrupting candidates could set a new standard in the business. "This is a form of communication that has to be invented anew," says Taylor. "Hillsman is showing it can be done a different way."

On the Cheap

"The only safe thing to take is a chance," reads the sign hanging in Hillsman's office. It's a motto he swears by for creative as well as pecuniary reasons. "If you don't do something out of the ordinary," he explains, "it's going to be expensive and ineffective." As Hillsman has demonstrated, a campaign can get more bang for its buck by placing a few attention-getting spots that pierce the public consciousness. Stick to ring-around-the-collar ads, and you'll have to spend a fortune blanketing the airwaves to get your message across. "There is no reason a presidential campaign should cost $20 million [the current number being bandied about as the price of entry]," says Hillsman.

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"It's ineffective communication that drives up the price that high."

The generic quality of political ads can be traced to the assembly-line approach that goes into their creation. The drill roughly follows these lines: Pollsters survey a candidate's name recognition and pinpoint issues on the voters' minds, then ad guys craft their commercials around the hot-button issues. The result, unsurprisingly, is ads that don't peddle a candidate so much as a collection of political stands.

As it turns out, Hillsman couldn't have followed the traditional blueprint on the Wellstone and Ventura campaigns even if he'd wanted to. Both candidates were so strapped for cash that Wellstone could commission only one poll, and Ventura couldn't even afford that. As far as Hillsman is concerned, that was just as well; he doesn't place much stock in pollsters. "Most consultants look at polls as oracles," he says. "But pollsters basically serve the function of researchers in ad firms. They're supposed to give you a basic sense for what's out there. They're not supposed to write the script."

To sell his candidates, Hillsman focused on what made his guys unique, tried to turn their weaknesses into strengths, and presented the message in an iconoclastic package. The drawbacks to Wellstone's candidacy weren't difficult to gauge: The little-known college professor had all of a 17 percent name recognition when he embarked on his quest to topple Boschwitz, and the 5'5 1/2" Wellstone wasn't going to be confused with Lloyd Bensten. But Wellstone possesses a disarming charm, and his experience on picket lines had trained him to think fast on his feet. Hillsman highlighted those qualities in a two minute spot called "Looking for Rudy," a witty knock-off of Michael Moore's film "Roger and Me." The commercial, designed to pressure Boschwitz to participate in a series of debates, was dubbed the most effective political spot in history by *Campaign* magazine.

In the ad, Wellstone is sent futilely traipsing across Minnesota in search of Boschwitz. With chutzpah worthy of a *60 Minutes* crew, Wellstone barges unannounced into Boschwitz's campaign headquarters and office with Hillsman and a video camera in tow. In one scene, Wellstone banters with some young Republicans straight from central casting, who warn him, "We don't like strangers walking around here." As he passes a BMW in the parking lot of Boschwitz's office, Wellstone remarks, "Nice car." When Boschwitz's assistant lends Wellstone a pen, the candidate tells her he's keeping it because his campaign doesn't have much money. At the end of the commercial, Wellstone posits a request—if viewers run into a certain silver-haired gentleman, could they tell him his challenger is looking for him? The message comes through loud and clear: Wellstone, not the aloof senator holed up in Washington, is the genuine man-of-the-people.

"Looking for Rudy" only aired a handful of times, but the spot garnered dozens of free showings on local news reports and became the topic of cocktail chatter across the state. "Boschwitz's people called up and said, 'OK, we'll schedule the debates, but you've got to pull the ad,'" says Hillsman. "They didn't realize we couldn't run it again; we'd basically spent our last dime." While Wellstone trailed his competitor into the last week, he ultimately took home 52 percent of the vote in the election.

When Hillsman signed on to Jesse Ventura's gubernatorial campaign eight years later, he knew every spot he created would have to be a standout. Ventura couldn't afford to air commercials until the last weeks before election day, and the campaign was relying on the ads' buzz to generate free media attention. In addition to the tight budget, Hillsman had another hurdle to overcome: Ventura was scheduled to be on the stump non-stop, so he couldn't appear in the commercials. As a result, Hillsman couldn't capitalize on Ventura's charismatic presence, one of the campaign's biggest assets.

Hillsman came up with an ingenious solution—he turned Ventura into a toy action figure. Once again, it was a way to package the "personality" of the product in a hard-to-ignore manner, while turning the limitations of the Ventura candidacy into strengths. When Jesse's alter-ego grapples with Special Interests Man, he comes across as a take-no-prisoners personality who breaks the mold of politics as usual. "The message was, 'this guy is not your average pol,'" says Hillsman.

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If anyone harbored the assumption Jesse *was* your run-of-the-mill candidate, that belief was undoubtedly put to rest in Hillsman's "The Thinker" spot. In that commercial, a body double for Jesse clothed in briefs posed as the Rodin sculpture, while strains of "La Casta Diva" played in the background. A voice-over details Jesse's achievements and family background, and bestowed the candidate with a new moniker: Jesse is no longer The Body, but The Mind. In case the audience suspects Ventura is taking himself too seriously, the spot closed with a sly smile and wink from the candidate. When Jesse eked out a 55,000 vote plurality in the general election, pundits pointed to the ad as one of the decisive factors that launched Ventura into the statehouse.

Keeping It Clean

Hillsman's action figure and scantily-clothed candidate weren't the only elements of Jesse's ad campaign that differed from standard election fare. In contrast to virtually every person running for office, Ventura didn't field negative commercials. With the career politicians pummeling each other with a slew of negative ads, it was a shrewd move to abstain from the tit-for-tat rhetoric. While his competitors came off as two kids squabbling in a sandbox, Ventura appeared, well, almost *dignified.*

When Hillsman's guy is in a two-way race, however, he does create "contrast" ads. "If you are a challenger, the first case you have to make is why the incumbent has to be replaced," he says. But while Hillsman has made some trenchant criticisms of candidates, he doesn't engage in slash-and-burn tactics. Rather he gets the message across in a humorous, and frequently delightful, manner.

Consider "Kids," a 1990 Wellstone spot taking Boschwitz to task for his positions on children's issues. "If kids had money, maybe Senator Boschwitz would listen to them," says Wellstone, as a series of cherubic children scrawl out oversized checks payable to the senator. "But kids don't have money," Wellstone continues. "And Boschwitz votes against their best interest again and again ... it's time he paid." A hard hitting spot, to be sure, but the viewer is left smiling at the charming preschoolers while shaking his head at Boschwitz's voting record. "That was the most effective spot of the campaign," says Hillsman. "It's what got us even in the polls."

And then there was the tongue in cheek "Faces" commercial Hillsman did for Wellstone. At the beginning of the ad, the screen is filled with a head shot of Boschwitz. "You'll be seeing this face on TV a lot," says Wellstone. "It belongs to Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, who has $6 million to spend on commercials." Then, as Boschwitz's mug morphs into Wellstone's, Wellstone asks viewers to pretend every time they see the Republican's likeness they are actually seeing his challenger's—the man better prepared to represent their interests. Then comes the kicker: "Not to mention better looking." Hillsman says he had to persuade Wellstone to read the last line. "He kept saying, 'But I'm *not* better looking,'" recalls Hillsman. "And I would respond, 'Paul, that's the whole point.'"

These spots bear scant resemblance to the nasty attacks that crowd the airwaves every election cycle. As Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar point out in *Going Negative*, most political consultants use negative ads not so much to sway independents as to "activate" their voter base into making the trip to the polls. (In fact, negative ads have the effect of turning independents off politics altogether.) The punch-counter-punch rhythm of negative advertising is also lucrative for consultants, because they take a 15 percent cut of their candidates' ad buy. The more commercials candidates run, the fatter the commissions for ad men.

The demographic Ventura needed to lure to the voting booth was not going to be moved with traditional tactics. "Kids don't believe in the lesser theory of voting," says Hillsman. "You've got to give them a reason [to cast their ballot] or they'll stay at home." In order to reach the student vote, Ventura hit the state's college campuses, and the campaign ran ads on the youth-oriented Fox Channel. Hillsman, meanwhile, designed commercials specifically geared to the MTV crowd. His spots not only made it hip to vote for Jesse, he also tapped into an attitude many young Americans harbor in abundance: a healthy sense of indignation.

He's Like, the Man

"I believe Minnesota should return the entire $4 billion tax surplus to the hard-working people who turned it in," bellows Ventura in a radio spot. "I believe that Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones are two of the best rock bands ever." As a rallying cry, it's not "We Shall Overcome," but Hillsman's hip, attitude-laden ads held a lot of appeal for kids turned off by stale political palaver. Hillsman understood that young Americans are raised on a culture of entertainment, and to turn them on to Ventura, his commercials would have to entertain. He dismisses critcism that his approach emphasizes style over substance. "Anyone who says you can squeeze a lot of information in a 30 second spot is kidding them-

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selves," he says. Once you've sparked an interest in the candidate, people will seek out other sources of information before they cast their lot with a particular politician, he insists. They might watch debates, hit the campaign's website, or attend a political rally (in defense of Hillsman's thesis, Ventura did draw enormous crowds on the stump at the end of the campaign). "Look, people's guards are up," says Hillsman. "They can smoke out the phony."

Jesse's appeal to the younger crowd stemmed in part to the fact he could speak their language. As a former wrestler, actor, and talk show host, Jesse had an appreciation for popular culture, and he knew what was going to work. Hillsman marvels that when he pitched the action figure commercial, Ventura approved the spot in two and a half seconds. "With any other campaign I would have had to explain for about two hours why it was a good concept," says Hillsman.

Perhaps the greatest roadblock to Ventura's election was the perception that casting a ballot for him was a wasted vote, because there was no way the former wrestler would prevail. Jesse took the naysayers head-on in the radio spot "Insignificant." "Do you realize what they're saying?" he growled in the commercial. "They're saying you're powerless. No, it's worse than that. They're saying you're *insignificant*, and that what you believe in doesn't matter at all." This wasn't an ad for soccer moms, it was for the *sons* of soccer moms who had been denied the keys to the car just a few years before. If you've ever been in the throes of post-adolescence, you'll remember how young twenty-somethings chafe at their lack of authority. Jesse gave voice to their frustration. "If you believe in my positions, then vote for me, Jesse Ventura," the candidate commanded his audience. They did. On election day, thousands of kids took advantage of Minnesota's same-day registration option to cast their votes for Ventura. Without the surge in youth turnout, Minnesotans would be adjusting to life under Republican Governor Norm Coleman, and the Jesse sideshow would be a mere footnote in campaign history.

A New Way

Obviously, Hillsman's collaboration with the media-savvy Ventura is not the norm in political circles. Pair Hillsman up with a more conventional candidate, political handlers say, and his off-beat style won't work. "The man is a high-wire artist," opines Carleton College professor Steven Schier. "He's risky. He's good with someone dramatic and unconventional, but I don't think he would be a good match with a button-down candidate." Certainly, few incumbents have turned to Hillsman to engineer their reelection campaigns. (Even Wellstone tapped Washington-insider Mandy Grunwald to mastermind his successful 1996 senatorial race.) Political consultants also point out that a host of quirky factors contributed to Wellstone and Ventura's stunning upsets, and Hillsman's touch hasn't been successful in all of the 20-some campaigns he's worked on. Perhaps in reaction to Hillsman's cutting asides on "those guys," political consultants also hint the ad man suffers from an inflated ego. "I think a good sense of self is a healthy thing," says David Axelrod of Axelrod and Associates. "And Bill Hillsman is a very healthy man."

Hillsman counters that his niche isn't oddballs, but candidates who are willing to take risks. He has no interest in putting together spots for politicians who are itching for a more conventional approach. And because Hillsman's bread and butter is product advertising—he's hawked everything from Arctic Cat Snowmobiles to Swiss Miss for over two decades—he can afford to be choosy. "I'd never do this stuff full time and open a D.C. office," he says. "I'd become like everyone else. I wouldn't represent voters but pundits."

Hillsman casts a critical eye on inside-the-beltway ads and the effect they have on the political process. "I don't have a solution, but I can tell you the problem," he says. The standard consultant's package is so expensive that the average citizen can't afford to run for office. (Is it any surprise Democrats were recruiting millionaires to throw their hats in the ring in 1996?) "The worst part is these guys then churn out terrible ads that depress voter turn-out," says Hillsman. "The system doesn't work for candidates, and it doesn't work for voters."

His diagnosis is on the mark. But he shouldn't be so modest about his contribution to the solution. If campaign spending limits ever become a reality, imagemeisters could be forced to create high-quality spots, because bombarding the airwaves with conventional ads to hammer a message into voters' heads would no longer be an option. And if political handlers do eventually have to relearn their craft, watching Hillsman's whimsical ad reel would be a good first step. He's proved you can be effective without being nasty, get the issues across without prompting viewers to lunge for the remote control, and instead of "activating" fringe voters, lure a new generation of citizens to the polls. "The best thing that can happen is for as many people to participate as possible," says Hillsman. "And that's what I'm proudest of; the fact we brought so many new people into the process." ●

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Big Brother

How HMOs stole our right to medical privacy

By Kip Sullivan

A CONVICTED CHILD RAPIST LANDS A JOB at a Massachusetts hospital, gains access to hundreds of children's records, and calls the children. A Florida state public health worker sends the names of 4,000 HIV-positive patients to two Florida newspapers. An anti-gay fanatic releases a Topeka, Kan. councilwoman's blood bank records, which show her blood has hepatitis antibodies. Information about the suicide attempt of a candidate for Congress from New York is leaked to *The New York Post* on the eve of a primary election.

These stories are emblematic of an invasion of medical privacy that began roughly two decades ago and is now reaching catastrophic proportions. Patient records are now routinely shipped out of clinics, hospitals and pharmacies to HMOs, drug companies, drug benefit management companies, self-insured employers, researchers and government agencies. These rivers of patient data are being pooled into enormous computerized reservoirs of information all over the country.

Two developments made this attack on medical privacy possible: computers and the spread of "managed care." Before the advent of computers, patient records were kept on pieces of paper in doctors' offices. Even today, most patient records exist on paper, not in the memories of computers. But that is changing rapidly as more and more clinics and hospitals automate their record-keeping. There's no question that automation is helpful to both doctors and patients. Computerized records are more legible than handwritten notes; they're easier to retrieve, and they help doctors remember to carry out a variety of useful tasks, including warning patients about harmful drug interactions.

But the advent of computers alone cannot explain why patient data are routinely being shipped out of clinics and hospitals to people over whom doctors and patients have no control. To paraphrase the National Rifle Association, computers don't invade privacy, people do. Somebody has to decide that my computerized record cannot just sit unmolested at my doctor's office as my paper file did in olden days, but must be zapped across cyberspace to be viewed by third parties. The people who want to do this are the same people who promoted "managed competition" to the Clinton administration, and, when the Clinton bill failed, pushed HMOs to the top of the health care food chain anyway. These people are a motley bunch. They are executives of big businesses, HMOs, insurance companies like Blue Cross Blue Shield that have adopted HMO tactics, and hospital chains currying favor with HMOs, as well as politicians, pundits, and "experts" associated with universities and think tanks who peddle "competition" between HMOs as the solution to the health care crisis.

These people did not ask Americans if we approved of a health-care system dominated by HMOs. Nor did they ask us if we wanted our medical records routinely examined by strangers. Polls indicate that if we had been asked, we would have responded with a loud "no." Polls taken in the early 1990s revealed that Americans rejected the proposition that HMO rationing was essential to constraining health care inflation, and polls taken since the HMO coup in the mid-1990s indicate a sizable majority of Americans believe the new HMO-dominated system threatens quality of care. Experts agree. In 1996, the editors of the *New England Journal of Medicine* observed that "the quality of health care is now seriously threatened by our rapid shift to managed-care plans as the way to contain costs." The few polls that have sought to assess American attitudes about the invasion of our medical records indicate that large majorities oppose consentless invasion of medical records. A Time/CNN poll, for example, found that 87

Kip Sullivan *is research director for Minnesota COACT (Citizens Organized Acting Together).*

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percent of respondents believe that their permission should be sought by anyone seeking to look at their medical files.

The assault on medical privacy coincides with the HMO assault on the U.S. health care system for two reasons: (1) HMOs destroyed small, independent doctors and hospitals and provoked the creation of huge "integrated health systems" (corporations that house hospitals, clinics, and other providers under one roof); (2) HMOs cannot reduce medical services without access to patient medical records.

The spread of HMOs has provoked a rush to vastness within the entire health industry. Merger madness struck the insurance sector first, and then the health provider sector. HMOs got big in order to force doctors and hospitals to give them cut-rate prices and more cooperation in cutting services that smaller HMOs and traditional insurers could not get. Reduced fees and prices and fewer services in turn allowed big HMOs to keep their premiums lower than smaller insurers, which attracted more business, which begat more power to extract cut-rate deals from health care providers, etc. Doctors and hospital administrators reacted to the growth of big HMOs by organizing themselves into the equivalent of provider unions. Hospitals formed huge hospital chains, and doctors either formed their own multi-clinic empires or, more commonly, joined one of the hospital chains. This only provoked the HMOs to get bigger. And around the cycle went. The coagulation of the health system into huge HMOs and huge provider systems means computerized patient records are now loaded onto vast computer networks, not one- or two-computer systems housed in small offices.

The HMO practice of routinely demanding patient medical records from doctors is also expanding the vast audience looking at patient records. HMO employees read patient records in order to perform "utilization review," which refers to the HMO practice of reviewing, and often vetoing or altering, decisions by doctors. As the name of this practice suggests, the purpose of utilization review is nearly always cost control, not quality control. With the exception of a half-dozen inexpensive preventive services, HMOs rarely perform what we might call "nonutilization review," that is, review of a doctor's refusal to perform a service.

Believe it or not, Bill Clinton and leaders of both political parties propose to aggravate the conditions that have provoked the assault on patient privacy—the proliferation of huge computer systems loaded with patient data, and the HMO habit of reading patient files. Legislation proposed by both political parties in recent years would legalize the consentless review of patient files by a host of third parties, including HMOs and employers, and would make it easier for the burgeoning computer networks to talk to each other.

Bill Clinton was the first to propose legislation establishing a national patient data base. His 1993 universal health insurance bill (the Health Security Act) would have set up a national patient information depot, and all providers would have been required to funnel patient records into it. The bill died in 1994, but the dream of a central information depot with cradle-to-grave medical records on all Americans lived on. A law enacted by Congress in 1996, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), contains provisions which break down barriers between computer systems and which will, in effect, create a national database for patient records. HIPAA requires that Congress enact privacy protections by August 1999. If Congress fails to act by then, the recommendations of the Secretary of Health and Human Services regarding third-party access to patient records will become law.

In September 1997, Donna Shalala, Clinton's Secretary of HHS, appeared before the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources to announce her recommendations—recommendations that will become law if Congress does not act. Shalala proposed to allow consentless access to patient files by various parties who need the files "for health purposes." Shalala offered no definition of a "health purpose." She merely offered a few examples of what a "health purpose" is not (reading employee files in order to make "hiring and firing" decisions was one).

Republicans have been equally cavalier. Bills introduced by Republicans this year would authorize invasion of patient records by health care "entities" carrying out "health care operations." S 881 and HR 448 define "health care operations" to include a smorgasbord of vaguely described activities, including "utilization review," "coordinating health care," and "conducting quality assessment and improvement activities." Similarly, S 578 says "health care operations" includes "utilization review," "management functions of a health care provider or health plan," and, for good measure, "services the Secretary [of HHS] determines appropriate."

How do these anti-privacy politicians justify this assault on patient privacy, an assault that so clearly antagonizes the average citizen? It is difficult to say. Anti-privacy advocates typically offer only unsupported, abstractly phrased assertions that the invasion of privacy is necessary to achieve "cost containment," "qual-

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ity assurance," "research," and "the common good." These claims are usually preceded by hosannas for the new HMO-dominated health care system. The following statement by Secretary Shalala in her September 1997 testimony is typical of the glib style of anti-privacy advocates: "Today, revolutions in our health care delivery system mean that instead of Marcus Welby we must place our trust in entire networks of insurers and health care professionals ... We cannot turn back the hands of progress or turn our backs on public responsibilities like research. ... We must look ahead and balance our age-old right to be left alone with our desire to fulfill the promises of a new age in health care. ... Individuals' claims to privacy must be balanced by their public responsibility to contribute to the common good, through use of their information for important, socially useful purposes."

Lying beneath this cant is a bogus, unarticulated assumption, namely, that the "common good" has been served by the HMOs and "entire networks" that engulfed Marcus Welby. There is, however, little evidence that HMOs have saved money, and considerable evidence that if they have cut costs it has been at the expense of patients. Those who assert that HMOs save money usually cite the reduction in health care inflation that occurred between 1993 and 1996. It is true that the United States enjoyed a four-year lull in its health care inflation rate following the outbreak of merger madness in 1993. But it is not clear whether this lull was the typical temporary lull that follows a merger spree in any industry (oligopolists often keep their prices artificially low during a shake-out in order to seize market share quickly), or if it reflects a long-term reduction in health care inflation caused by the rapid metastasizing of HMO cost-control practices throughout the system.

A substantial body of evidence indicates that quality of care has declined since HMOs took over, which suggests that even if HMOs have cut health care inflation it was done on the backs of patients (for the evidence indicating HMOs are damaging quality of care for the elderly, see my article in the March issue of the *Monthly*). Even if you think the recent inflation lull was HMO-induced, and even if you think it was achieved without damage to quality, you must still explain why U.S. health care costs are double those of the rest of the industrialized world where insurance is universal and where HMOs do not dole out health care. Anti-privacy advocates rarely speak about other countries' health care systems.

The argument that patient privacy has to die on the altar of "quality assurance" is especially ironic. In the days of Marcus Welby, no one argued that it was up to health insurance companies to improve medical care by subjecting doctors to "quality assurance" reviews. "Quality assurance," a phrase borrowed from the manufacturing industry, only came into vogue in medicine with the advent of HMOs. The reason is obvious: By placing constant pressure on doctors to deny services, HMOs threaten quality of care; ergo, "quality assurance" is a good thing.

This reasoning was first promoted by Dr. Paul Ellwood, the man who invented the phrase "health maintenance organization" and who convinced Richard Nixon to support the HMO Act of 1973, the law that subsidized the formation of the U.S. HMO industry. Ellwood recognized that HMO financial incentives for doctors put patients at risk of receiving inferior care. In private meetings with Nixon officials in 1970, and in a seminal article for the journal *Medical Care* in 1971, Ellwood argued that "competition" between HMOs would protect patients from inferior care, but only if "consumers" were given "performance reports" on HMOs which permitted consumers to distinguish the good from the bad. Thus, if HMO A's performance report showed that more of its heart patients were dying than were patients of HMO B, A would lose market share, B would gain market share, and A would either clean up its act or go out of business.

There are several reasons why Ellwood's hope that "market forces" could protect patients from HMO abuse was doomed. One of the most significant is that HMO performance reports, now called "report cards," will be ludicrously expensive to prepare and publish (despite three decades of talk about report cards, useful report cards still do not exist). The most significant expense will be incurred in the course of collecting patient medical records for all or a substantial portion of the services provided to all or a substantial portion of American patients. HMO report cards require access to patient records in order to ensure that HMO "grades" are comparable. A simple comparison, for example, of the mortality rate of HMO A's heart surgeons with those of HMO B is useless if the health status of the patients seen by the two HMOs is not equivalent. Who cares if HMO A has a higher mortality rate if all of its patients are 80-year old men with serious comorbidities (e.g., cancer and depression) while all of HMO B's patients are 60-year-old men with no comorbidities?

Ellwood had an answer. In a 1988 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Ellwood called for a "massive, computerized data base" containing data on "millions of patients" that would "routinely and systemati-

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cally measure the functioning and well-being of patients." Ellwood claimed that pooling patient data "on a massive scale" would not only reduce the cost of constructing HMO report cards, but would advance medical science. The patient data that report-card publishers would need would be readily available, and researchers could dip into this database at will and find out which treatments were working best.

Ellwood's argument that report cards, with or without a centralized database, can protect patients in a system dominated by HMOs is preposterous. It assumes that unnamed researchers can annually evaluate the quality of thousands of different health care services provided by a half million doctors and millions of other health care professionals working for 1,500 insurance companies, that literate consumers (never mind the illiterate) have the time to read and the capacity to evaluate all these data, and that society can afford the cost of the information systems and research necessary to assemble and publish HMO report cards.

But Ellwood's vision of a national patient database did not provoke ridicule or outrage. Instead, it attracted powerful adherents in the world of politics and business. In 1992, a group of business executives, including vice-presidents of GE and Prudential, and conservative intellectuals assembled by Ellwood endorsed the call for a national patient database as a means to "hold HMOs accountable" for good health care. In 1993, Bill Clinton signed on as well.

By 1995, when Republicans took control of Congress, it was apparent that Republican leaders had also subscribed to the Ellwood vision. William Thomas (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Ways and Means subcommittee on health, is an enthusiastic advocate of invading patient privacy to "assure" HMO quality. At a hearing in Minneapolis conducted in 1998 by the recently disbanded National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, Thomas condemned Minnesota's new law (one of the few in the country) requiring patient consent before providers may release medical records to third parties. He claimed it made it difficult for HMOs to prepare "quality packages" that inform consumers about HMO quality.

The argument that a centralized database, or even the large regional databases now being assembled by the health insurance industry, will enhance medical research has some merit, but not enough to warrant the destruction of patient privacy. For the last 50 years, medical research has been advanced primarily by scientific experiments financed by taxpayers and private investors (typically pharmaceutical manufacturers; according to one study, HMOs devote only 0.3 percent of their revenues to research). The most reliable of these experiments use what is called "prospective" methodology, which means scientists decide prior to the experiment how to control for variables that could confound the results. Studies that examine patient records after treatment has been given are called "retrospective" studies. The methodologies of retrospective studies are usually not as reliable because numerous variables that could have influenced the results are not controlled. Most importantly, from the patient's point of view, scientists conducting prospective experiments usually get patient consent. Anti-privacy advocates argue that getting patient consent would make using a national database more expensive. They are right.

It is possible to roll back the assault on privacy, but it will require reforms that will outrage the HMOs. Restoring patient privacy will require eliminating the two conditions I spoke of at the outset—the proliferation of huge provider networks that share patient files by computer, and the HMO habit of seizing patient files. To eliminate the enormous computer networks, we must return control of the health care system to the smaller-scale units that dominated prior to the ascendance of HMOs. We would, in other words, have to dissolve the hospital and clinic chains into smaller, independent units. Patient records would still be held on computers, but the computers would no longer need to be linked to hundreds of other computers owned by one corporation. We could stop HMOs from commandeering patient files simply by passing a law requiring patient consent for any third party to see a medical record.

Alternatively, we could set up a single-payer system in which one payer (the government) reimburses doctors and hospitals. Because insurance companies, including HMOs, would be out of the picture, and because the single-payer agency would control costs by setting limits on the price at which health services are sold, not by quarreling with doctors, the current insurer practice of demanding patient files would disappear. Because patients could see any doctor they wished, patients would drift away from the sprawling provider networks evoked by the HMO juggernaut in favor of smaller clinics (research indicates that patients prefer smaller clinics).

Either of these alternatives would go a long way toward creating the kind of health care system most Americans want: a system in which doctors and patients, not HMOs, make decisions about what services patients need, and in which patients can speak to doctors without fear of having their words plastered across cyberspace. ●

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The Scandal of Special Ed

It wastes money and hurts the poor

BY ROBERT WORTH

IF YOU'VE EVER WONDERED WHAT THE words "special education" mean, consider Saundra Lemons. A tall, gangly 19 year-old senior in a Washington D.C. public high school, she is quiet and attentive. Like the vast majority of children in special ed, she's not blind or deaf or confined to a wheelchair; instead, she has had trouble learning to read. If dollars were education, Saundra would be in fine shape. D.C. pours almost a third of its total education budget into the 10 percent of its students who are special ed. In theory—or rather, in wealthy school districts—this money buys kids like Saundra all kinds of assistance: special tutoring sessions, a modified curriculum, specially trained therapists and consultants, even untimed tests.

But Saundra wasn't born in a wealthy suburb. So when she started having trouble in first grade, she was placed—like many kids in D.C.—into a dead-end classroom where she learned nothing. In her case, it was a class for the mentally retarded. It took six years for a teacher to notice that Saundra wasn't retarded at all. Now she's catching up, but probably not fast enough to attend college next year. "You can never make up for that lost time," says one social worker who has helped Saundra.

Twenty five years after the passage of the nation's special ed law, the Individuals with Disabilites Education Act (IDEA), the real scandal is not simply that we spend too much to educate handicapped kids. It's the inequity in the way the law is applied. At an estimated $35 billion a year, special education is like a huge regressive tax—helpful to those wealthy enough to take advantage of it, and often harmful to those who are not.

Furthermore, poor children like Saundra who get shunted into dead-end classrooms aren't the only victims. In order to pay for special ed's enormous, ineffectual bureaucracy and skyrocketing enrollments, school districts are being forced to cheat their conventional students. Unlike general education, special ed is a federal mandate: School districts can be sued (and routinely are) for not providing every service parents think is appropriate for their disabled kids. It's also massively underfunded. When IDEA was passed in 1975, the feds offered to pay up to 40 percent of the costs. They've averaged less than 10 percent ever since, and states don't make up the difference. This is not the kind of program you can fund with bakesales. One southern California district has seen its special ed layouts grow from $3 million to almost $11 million in just the past three years. School districts face a painful choice: raise local property taxes or cut back on students. "We are cannibalizing our regular education budget," says Joe Quick, an administrator in the Wisconsin public school system. "For the first time since 1975, teachers are saying 'why are those kids here?' ... it's really starting to drive a wedge between regular ed and special ed."

Republicans in Congress have pounced on this issue, declaring Clinton a hypocrite for announcing new school initiatives without promising to increase special education funding first. "What President Clinton isn't saying about his new budget is how he has decided to ... trim special education funding," declared Rep. Bill Goodling (R-Pa.), a former teacher and superintendent and chair of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, in March. "The president decided not to provide funding for our most vulnerable children," added Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. The irony here is delicious: The party that tried to abolish the Department of Education and slash the federal role in education has now become a cheerleader for the most regulated and costly federal program under the sun.

Democrats counter that their plan to hire 100,000 new teachers will reduce the need for referrals to special ed in the first place. But neither party has even tried to reform special ed's mountainous bureau-

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cracy and skewed incentives. It's not hard to see why. "If you criticize [IDEA] you will be publicly villified as anti-handicap," says James Fleming, superintendent of the Capistrano Unified school district, near Los Angeles. "But what is happening now will absolutely destroy public education before the next decade is out."

The Road to Hell

There's no question that the special ed law served a crying need. Before Congress passed it in 1975, an estimated one million handicapped kids were not getting any education at all, and vastly disporportionate numbers of black children were being warehoused under the rubric "educably mentally retarded." The new law's intention was to remedy these conditions by mandating "specially designed instruction" for each child and "related services to meet his unique needs," including transportation, physical therapy, speech therapy, psychological counseling, occupational therapy, social work and services, and virtually anything else a child might conceivably need. To ensure that no one was left out, Congress mandated that each handicapped child receive an Individualized Education Plan from a multi-disciplinary team, which would specify long and short-term goals, and describe required services and special equipment. Furthermore, handicapped children had to be taught in the "least restrictive environment."

IDEA has achieved some of its main goals. Far fewer handicapped children sit at home staring at the walls, and the number attending college has more than tripled since 1978. According to the Department of Education, 62 percent of people with disabilites age 16 to 24 were employed in 1994, compared with 31 percent in the 16 to 64 age range—which suggests that far more are entering the workplace than ever before.

At first, accomodating the handicapped didn't seem like such a big job; total costs were about $1 billion in 1977. Yet little by little, Congress has added new categories to the original list of 13 disabling conditions. Children age three to five are now included, as are those with autism and traumatic brain injuries—both categories that require intensive supervision and therapy. In March, the Supreme Court ruled that an Iowa school district must pay for full-time nursing care for a high school sophmore named Garret Frey who is paralyzed from the neck down. Meanwhile the most porous special ed category, "learning disabilities," exploded as parents realized it could be made to include virtually any child who isn't living up to his potential. "It's just like a nightmare," says April Port, special ed director for Marin County, Calif. "They keep opening the barn door wider and wider, and the burden is always on the school." Currently, special ed costs the nation about $35 billion, with some estimates running closer to $60 billion.

In almost any individual case, it's hard not to sympathize with the family. Garret Frey is a likeable, smart kid, who has no trouble keeping up with his peers academically. For all we know, he could become a great scientist like the wheelchair-bound Stephen Hawking, the theorist of space-time. But he won't be able to do so unless someone pays for his medical supervision. Handicapped kids often struggle heroically to get by in school, and it's no wonder their parents feel entitled to extra help. One father told me in a voice choking with rage about how he had gone to school to confront a teacher who had taunted and bullied his boy, who has severe learning disabilities. "You hear about some parents demanding horseback riding lessons for their autistic kids, and it sounds ludicrous," another parent told me. "But when you see what they're going through, believe me, you want to do anything you can if there's any chance it would help."

The trouble is that the law pits the single interest of every disabled child against the broader interest of the school and arms his parents with a legal right to a "free and appropriate public education" in "least restrictive environment." Needless to say, the vagueness of these words is a recipe for litigation. A whole cottage industry of lawyers and advocates has grown up to help parents get what they want out of the school system. Furthermore, school districts must pay parents' court fees if they lose. Overburdened, underfunded, and without the expert legal advice parents can draw on, schools tend to give in rather than face a case that could bankrupt them. "Districts will provide services they don't think are appropriate because they can't afford to go to court," says April Port. One southern California school district pays for a severely brain-damaged boy to attend a specialized school in Massachussetts, and to fly his parents and sister out for regular visits, at an annual cost of roughly $254,000. The superintendent only balked when the family demanded extra visits for the boy's sister.

Parents of severely disabled kids also regularly try to shoehorn them into mainstream classes, even when it would do little good for the child and plenty of harm to the rest of the class. It's true that for years schools were too quick to put seriously handicapped

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kids into classes of their own, where they often learned little and got no experience interacting with ordinary people. But special ed teachers tend to agree that the pendulum has now swung too far in the other direction. "It's hard for parents to give up the dream that their kid is normal," says April Port. The 1997 amendments to the IDEA strengthen the parents' hands: Teachers must prove that a child would be better off in separate classes before they move them, and that can be very hard to do. "Often you'll have a kid with a 40 or 50 IQ, at a pre-kindergarten level, with very little language," says one California elementary school teacher. "The kid is all over the place, and the teacher has no idea what to do." In response, many districts are paying for aides—babysitters, really—to sit with the student all day long. "Mainstreaming is creating a huge financial burden," says Port.

A Wisconsin administrator told me his state's schools are "cannibalizing" their regular ed programs to pay for special ed.

Defining Disability Down

Still, if special ed were merely a matter of accomodating physically disabled kids like Garret Frey, it would be a relatively straightforward affair. Unfortunately, the special ed law has inflated the meaning of "disability," encouraging wealthier families to capitalize on their weaknesses at the expense of their peers. "We are talking about kids who get tired," says Superintendent James Fleming of Capistrano Unified. "We are talking about people thinking any problem their kid has is a handicap." At worst, the handicap designation—designed to protect kids from discrimination—can become a protection against any sort of discipline. "We found one kid with enough pot on him to be selling," says Fleming. "We suspended him. Then the parents were contacted by an advocate who said 'all you have to say is that you're handicapped.' Sure enough, the kid was back in school the next day. The kids he sold to were expelled." The 1997 amendments to IDEA gave schools a little more latitude in disciplining violent special ed kids, but the problem remains.

Meanwhile, the largest area of disability inflation, known as "specific learning disabilites," remains unaddressed. Learning disabilities, or LDs, account for over 51 percent of all children in special ed, and the numbers are growing at astounding speed. Technically, the 1975 law defines LD as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations." Lest this be an open invitation to anyone who has trouble with their homework, the regulations stipulate that a diagnostic team shall identify as LD those students who show a "severe discrepancy" between their achievement in one or more subject areas and their intelligence, usually as measured by an IQ test.

Yet even with this diagnostic testing, LD is a notoriously plastic category. There are 50 state definitions in addition to the federal one, and the methods used to determine intelligence vary wildly. More than 80 percent of all school children in the United States could qualify as learning-disabled under one definition or another, according to University of Minnesota researcher James Ysseldyke. Even if LDs do exist as a legitimate category, it is not a foregone conclusion that learning-disabled children should receive more help than garden variety poor readers. Why should a kid with a genius IQ but only above-average reading skills get extra help, while his average-scoring peers get none—no matter what obstacles they've overcome? It seems especially unfair that the rules should specifically exclude kids whose learning problems derive from "environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage."

LD advocates respond by citing voluminous studies purporting to demonstrate that LDs are real, and that they respond to treatment. But the scientific status of LDs is still cloudy at best, and it's not clear that LD students respond any better than their undiagnosed peers. Indeed, "[T]here is considerable evidence that non-LD pupils would benefit from higher levels of educational inputs, and even stronger evidence that as a group, if not in each individual case, those diagnosed with LDs have been remarkably unresponsive to the costly special education that has been provided to them," write Mark Kelman and Gillian Lester in their 1998 book, *Jumping the Queue: An Inquiry into the Legal Treatment of Students with Learning Disabilites.* "There is very scant evidence that dyslexics, for instance, benefit more from the interventions of read-

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ing specialists than do garden variety poor readers."

Furthermore, the LD diagnosis is often little more than an expression of class bias. As Kelman and Lester write, "a student is viewed as LD when the observer finds it *surprising* that he or she is performing poorly." These expectations, of course, are likely to be informed by the parents' social status. Learning disabilities grew out of a grassroots movement by middle-class parents in the 1950s and '60s who wanted a label—and extra help—for what they saw as their "under-achieving" children. That's not to say that some bright kids don't suffer from dyslexia and other serious reading problems. But there's little doubt that the meaning of the LD diagnosis depends, in large measure, on who your parents are.

Consider Michael, a slender, sandy-haired fourth grader in a public school in Marin, one of California's wealthiest counties. Michael's teacher says he has an IQ in the high 120s, but he's about two years behind his classmates in reading. His parents are both wealthy professionals who don't have much time to spend with him—which may account for his reading problems. But his teachers didn't want lawsuits, so they wrote an education plan that includes a modified curriculum with separate tests, special reading sessions in a "resource" room, a buddy to read with, and books on tape to keep him on track. If his problems persist, his parents will see to it that he gets any other accomodations the school can offer, including untimed tests, and eventually, an untimed SAT, to increase his chances of going to Stanford like Mom and Dad did. "We get a lot of referrals junior year," says another teacher in Michael's school. "Parents want to cut their kid a break. And it's starting a lot earlier." The words LD, she adds, no longer have any tainting stigma. Yale psychologist Robert J. Sternberg, who has spent years preparing a book on LDs, agrees. "That's the funny thing—before, no one would want that label. Now it's almost a cachet."

Despite the fact that LD isn't meant to apply to kids whose problems derive from poverty, teachers in poorer schools routinely bend the rules in order to get more attention for kids who are failing. Crowded and decaying inner-city classrooms are a handicap in their own right, and poverty itself can cut deeply into a child's learning. According to the Children's Defense Fund, middle-class children starting first grade have been exposed to 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one reading, while their low-income counterparts have been exposed to only *25 hours*. It's little wonder that so many of these kids get referred to special ed.

But these efforts often backfire when the students end up in dead-end classrooms where they'll be even less likely to learn. "You need to look at who gets the benefits of being diagnosed LD and who gets the bad side," says Mark Kelman. Tony, an African-American boy from northeast Washington, D.C., is fairly typical. He was diagnosed with learning disabilites a few years ago at roughly the same age as Michael. Like many kids in large urban school systems, he didn't get any help at all, and began falling further behind. Unhappy with his failures, he began "acting out" in class, whereupon he was reassessed and classified "emotionally disturbed" and put into separate classes. There he was taught nothing and his behavior got worse, because many of his genuinely disturbed classmates picked fights with him. By the sixth grade he barely knew the alphabet. Yet Tony is neither stupid nor disturbed. A public interest lawyer managed to work a minor miracle, getting him assessed and transferred to a private school, where he has thrived. "If he'd had the appropriate intervention in third or fourth grade," says the lawyer, "who knows where he'd be now."

According to researchers who have studied trends in the treatment of LD across country, these patterns apply nationwide. Kelman and Lester argue that the current system "continues to permit relatively privileged white pupils to capture high-cost or non-stigmatic in-class resources that others with similar educational deficits cannot obtain while, at the same time, allowing disproportionate numbers of African-American and poor pupils to be shunted into self-contained classes."

Bureaucrazy

Why does special ed serve the poor so badly? Part of the answer has to do with its massive, ineffectual, and self-perpetuating bureaucracy. Beneath the federal Office of Special Education Programs, which does research and audits states and school districts, there is a state office, and a localized Special Education Local Plan Area office, and a school district office. This is all on top of whatever counselors, psychologists, therapists, and "educational evaluators" a given school may have working for it. And in some individual states and cities, the situation is even worse. New York City, for instance, has its own separate bureaucracy, jokingly called the "Board of Special Ed," thanks to consent decree that grew out of a lawsuit by advocates for special ed students in 1979.

Given this focus on legal liability and procedure, it's little wonder that teaching takes a back seat to paper-pushing."[Special ed teachers] complain they're spending 50 to 60 percent of their time filling out

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forms," says Kim Reid, a professor at Columbia Teachers' College. This constant bureaucratic drain makes it that much harder to recruit talented young people. It's bad enough dealing with disabled or disturbed children and their grieving, angry parents all day. The job is so stressful that the average shelf life of special ed teachers is three years, says Reid. The Department of Education website, which proudly displays the voluminous 1997 amendments to the IDEA, notes tersely a "'chronic' shortage of special education teachers who are fully certified in their positions."

The burden of this teacher crisis, and the top-heavy bureaucracy that fuels it, falls disproportionately on the poor. Wealthier parents, after all, can use the law to force schools to accomodate them or place their child in a private school. In Washington, D.C., such private placements account for over a third of the District's entire $167 million special ed budget, even though less than one-sixth of the district's special ed students attend private school. (The special ed budget itself comprises almost a third of the *entire* school budget, even though only one-tenth of the District's students are in special ed.)

What is left over for the students whose parents lack the money or know-how to work the system to their advantage? Precious little. Despite all those bureaucrats hired to evaluate and place students, more than 250 students in D.C. haven't received an initial evaluation, and almost 2,200 are overdue for their second evaluation. Many of these kids are like Saundra Lemons, languishing in inappropriate classes until an "evaluator" notices them. Often it's far too late by that time, since the crucial learning years are the earliest, and catching up is far more difficult when children are older. And being evaluated doesn't always help. "Often the kid ends up in a class with 20 kids, all with different disabilities, and a teacher who's trained in one of those," says Nancy Opalack, a D.C. social worker. "No one learns anything." Teachers in the district estimate that half the kids in special ed drop out by 10th grade.

Gross Inequities

Yet anyone who's spent time in an inner-city classroom can tell you that the challenges the average poor kid faces are often hard to distinguish from those you'll find in special ed. This may be the greatest absurdity of the special ed law: It fails to acknowledge "environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage" as disabling conditions. Why should a child with a broken back be guaranteed round-the clock, state-of-the-art medical care, no matter what the cost, while the millions of kids whose difficulties stem from poverty and neglect are left to hope that their teachers will break the rules so they can get some extra help? Should we really be spending $10 billion (at least) a year on "learning disabilites" when we still don't adequately fund Head Start and Title I, the federal programs that were designed to help poor children catch up with their wealthier peers?

If the goal of public education is to give everyone a roughly equal start by the time they reach adulthood, it simply doesn't make sense to privilege obstacles that can be given a medical diagnosis over those that derive from poverty—which may be the greatest handicapping condition of all. The fact that the special ed bureaucracy often *prevents* poor kids from getting the help they need, by making them wait until they've been properly evaluated, only adds insult to injury.

Reforming IDEA is no easy task. Any politician who touches it runs the risk of being branded a cold-hearted enemy of kids in wheelchairs. But before we start pouring billions more into the program, Congress should ask whether it's really serving the goal of equal opportunity for all. And if special ed has become a kind of band-aid for schools that lack money to teach their kids adequately, or for kids whose parents never prepared them in the first place, then perhaps it's time to address those problems head-on. Kids like Garret Frey deserve a shot at success—but not at the expense of kids like Saundra Lemons. ●

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History vs. Loyalty

Stephanopoulos' important but untimely memoir

By James Fallows

ALL TOO HUMAN
By George Stephanopoulos
Little, Brown, $27.95

THIS IS AN INTERESTING book that should not have been written.

At this point, readers with long memories will be saying, "Wait a minute, how can he complain?" I was involved in a situation somewhat like Stephanopoulos' 20 years ago, and some people have even blamed me for starting the tradition that gives us instant-confessional books like this one. There are better and worse reasons why people entrusted with a political confidence might decide to break it. I think that Stephanopoulos' reasons were not good enough.

First, my story. In the summer of 1976, as Jimmy Carter was wrapping up the Democratic nomination for the presidency, I signed on as a speechwriter in his campaign. I was then in my mid-20s, was living with my wife in Texas, and was writing freelance articles for various magazines. When I signed up with Carter, I had already voted for him in the primary and thought he was the Democrats' best hope. I had barely started in journalism, and I was working on the principle that writers can do a better job if *once* in their career they have had hands-on experience in politics or public life. While I hoped to continue writing when the Carter episode was over, I did not join the administration as a mole. I wanted to help him win, and after that to help him do a good job in office—and when it was over, to use the experience as a source of general intuition about politics and government, not a stockpile of secrets to reveal.

Things turned out in a way that no one involved foresaw. During the campaign, the chief speechwriter had been Patrick Anderson. After Carter won, Anderson left, and I got that job in the White House. I stayed for two years. Then I resigned and joined the staff of the *Atlantic Monthly*, for which I'd previously done freelance articles. Early in 1979 the *Atlantic* published, as a cover story, my article "The Passionless Presidency," with a shorter follow-up the next month. The articles contended that the Carter administration had defects that were potentially fatal but at least in principle correctable. Unless he changed course in several basic ways, I argued, he'd lose his influence and perhaps even lose his office.

The articles caused a flap at the time and left hard feelings that endure to this day among some former members of the Carter administration. The complaint was not about the articles' accuracy but about my disloyalty. In the guise of wanting to "help" Carter or save his administration, I had (it was said) only hurt the man who had taken me into his trust.

No normal person likes to be seen as disloyal. But I felt justified, even compelled to write those articles at the time. My uneasiness about Stephanopoulos' book has made me wonder whether I was just fooling myself 20 years ago. But I think there are at least four differences between what Stephanopoulos has done and the way I went public with complaints. Indeed, there are differences between this book and what anyone else has done before; Stephanopoulos' action represents something unpleasant, and new.

One consideration is money. If you're doing something whose appearances will be questionable in any case, then it's not a good idea to take a lot of money while doing so—unless you don't care about appearances at all. I was paid for writing the Carter articles,

JAMES FALLOWS, *a contributing editor for* The Washington Monthly, *is the author of six books, most recently* Breaking the News.

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but the pay was my normal salary from the *Atlantic*, which at the time was quite modest. I declined a series of lucrative, cash-up-front offers from publishing houses to turn these into the first "inside" book about the Carter presidency. The richest of the offers was equivalent to five years' *Atlantic* salary.

I said no partly because I'd said as much as I had to say about Carter and didn't want to be cast as "disgruntled former speechwriter" for years to come. But I also hoped to avoid giving detractors an easy and obvious way to dismiss my motives for having complained publicly about the administration. I could almost hear Jody Powell saying, "Well, he's taken his thirty pieces of silver." When you are getting nearly $3 million dollars to tell what you saw, as Stephanopoulos did, it becomes very hard to avoid the impression that you're simply tattling for money.

A second consideration is how personalized the critique seems—personally indulgent about the criticizer, personally nasty toward the politician. Robert Manning, who was then the editor of the *Atlantic*, shrewdly cut a few gee-whiz passages that made my articles seem to be about me (how excited I was to travel on Air Force One, how much more money I was making at the White House than I had at *The Washington Monthly*). Such details would have their place in a political coming-of-age book, but they got in the way of what was supposed to be a case about the administration. And in making that case, I tried to use personal details about Carter only to the extent they affected his performance as president.

This may seem a meaningless distinction—nearly anything about a president affects the way he does his job. And it may seem hypocritical, coming from me. One vivid personal detail that I supplied—Carter's supervision of requests to use the White House tennis court—was easier to remember, and therefore did more damage, than most of the high-policy objections his detractors might raise. But this was in a sense *the* representative detail about the administration: the president's application of his time and intelligence to unworthily small-scale matters, while neglecting the sweeping leadership responsibilities of the job. Later there was dispute about whether Carter actually handled the tennis court requests. I had notes in his neat handwriting about courts and times; if his secretary had in fact forged those, the significant point is that everyone believed they came from the president himself.

It is hard to know which standard Stephanopoulos has used in deciding to disgorge personal information—or more precisely, hard to imagine that he has held back anything at all, considering what he reveals. You can see one form of rationalization at work: if he says enough embarrassing things about himself (his treatment for depression, his joy in being famous), then he can say them about others too. But rather than dignifying the disclosures, this gives the whole account the bathos of a daytime talk show. An early review of the book made a perceptive point. Stephanopoulos recounts an awkward moment when he blundered into a breakfast room and saw Hillary Clinton browbeating Bill, who meanwhile shoveled cereal into his mouth. Stephanopoulos quickly excused himself and backed out. As the review pointed out, Stephanopoulos had enough tact in real life to recognize that this was something he wasn't meant to see, but not enough tact to leave it out of the book.

Third, there is the special awkwardness of a real insider publicly attacking the person he recently served. This wasn't the way I put it to my parents at the time, but the truth is, I was a nobody in the Carter administration. Some speechwriters have been very close to the presidents they serve. Others, including me, are just extra members of the staff.

When even a nobody complains publicly about a politician, questions of loyalty and betrayal arise. But it's something different when a truly central feature—the counterpart to Jody Powell or Hamilton Jordan in Carter's day, Ed Meese or Michael Deaver in Reagan's—turns against a long-time patron while the patron is still in office. That is what makes Stephanopoulos' case so extraordinary. He had not been with Clinton for years and years. But within a few months of meeting Clinton, late in 1991, he was one of a handful of wholly trusted advisors. Within the campaign and then the administration, there was almost nothing Stephanopoulos did not see, hear, or know. Except for once on a softball field and once on a tennis court, I never saw Jimmy Carter outside a working situation. Stephanopoulos shared motel bedrooms with Clinton, talked with him through the bathroom door, was on the in-most side of any inside/outside division (at least in the administration's early days). To tell all the things you saw in this kind of intimate exposure is like going public about your spouse.

His complete-insider status also affects public response to his disclosures. As the White House press spokesman in 1993, Stephanopoulos was literally the public face of the administration. Before that, he had been the most prominent and unyielding of the Clinton campaign's counter-punchers, knocking down any criticism almost before it was made. Even after he lost

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his press spokesman job he was often pictured at Clinton's side, helping form policies and then fiercely defending them on talk shows and in interviews. And after all of this, for Stephanopoulos to recount the foibles of a sitting president—it's as if Jody Powell had gone public about Jimmy Carter's failings (which he knew better than anyone else), or Ray Price about Nixon's (*during* Watergate). There may be a precedent for (a) such an intimate advisor who was also (b) such a prominent presidential defender turning on the president (c) while he was still in office. But I don't know of one.

The nearest precedent—David Stockman's book *The Triumph of Politics*, which followed his confessional interview with William Greider for an *Atlantic Monthly* article in 1981—brings up the fourth distinction, which again underscores the rarity of Stephanopoulos' deed. Stockman, like Stephanopoulos, was a relative newcomer to a president's inner circle who quickly gained influence and became a symbol of an entire administration. Stockman, previously a congressman, was named Ronald Reagan's first director of the Office and Management and Budget. He soon became nearly as visible a public evangelist for supply-side tax cuts as Reagan himself, and was unquestionably the most important behind-the-scenes architect of the cuts. Near the end of Reagan's first year, Stockman revealed, via Greider, what Reagan's critics had claimed all along: that the administration was basically making up its economic assumptions. Far from paying for themselves, with magic "supply-side" revenue, the tax cuts were sure to generate huge deficits—as they later did.

Reaganites must have hated Stockman for saying this, but he had a defensible motive. He was arguing about a point of substance, and one of the most important points of that time. In my pipsqueak way—the difference being, again, that no one inside or outside the Carter administration thought I had shaped its policies—I had a similar motive in mind. I thought that the administration was doomed unless it made fundamental changes in strategy, and I thought that public discussion of the need for such changes was the most likely way to bring them about. I turned out to be right on the first count and maybe wrong/maybe not on the second. Public discussion of the problems did not fix them, but maybe nothing would have.

What, exactly, was the motive behind Stephanopoulos' revelations—*while Clinton is still in office*? *Newsweek* suggested nicely in the cover line on its excerpt from the book: "What I Saw." The theme of the book is not much more or less than his revealing whatever his privileged position allowed him to see.

What he reveals *is* generally intriguing, deftly-written, and historically significant. He makes vivid the obsession with short-term positioning, the struggles between the hard-liberal and "triangulated" liberal factions of the administration, the role of Mrs. Clinton, and many other aspects noted in reviews of the book. If he had waited to publish this book until the day Bill Clinton left office, it would have lasting historical value—like, say, William Safire's revelations about Richard Nixon in *Before the Fall*. Breaking confidences to inform history would also have left its author with a different historic role. He might have felt free to leave out the passages of tortured self-obsession that mainly seem salve for his tattling on Clinton. And the most often-quoted line in the book, a description of his arch-foe Dick Morris, would have seemed delightfully vivid and vicious writing, rather than a Freudian revelation about what Stephanopoulos senses he has done. Morris, he said, was " ... a small sausage of a man encased in a green suit with wide lapels, a wide floral tie, and a wide-collared shirt. His blow-dried pompadour and shiny leather briefcase gave him the look of a B-movie mob lawyer, circa 1975—the kind of guy who gets brained with a baseball bat for double-crossing his boss."

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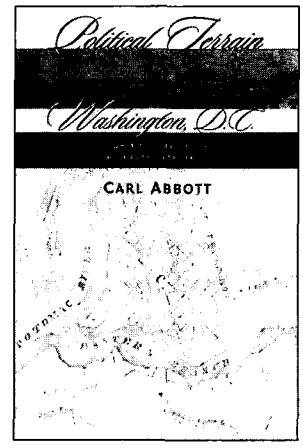

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Chicago's Conscience

Mike Royko was the voice of the common man for half a century

By Jack C. Doppelt

BETWEEN AL CAPONE AND MICHAEL JORDAN, there was Mike Royko. Each personified an era, each carried the identity of the same town on his broad shoulders, and each did it with one name tied behind his back.

ONE MORE TIME:
The Best of Mike Royko
By Mike Royko
Univ. of Chicago Press, $22

Capone was Chicago from Prohibition through his death in 1947 and well into the television age. Any Chicagoan who went abroad during that time would be greeted by the name Capone dropped into the conversation along with an animated tommy gun imitation.

Since 1984 it's been Michael's town anywhere on the planet.

For the twenty-year stretch from the late '60s to the late '80s, Chicago was Royko for people who didn't hail from there and for those who did. That is not to say that Chicago was without other identities during that period. Think Chicago and images fill the screen: the 1968 Democratic National Convention when the political divide opened onto the streets; the Harold Washington years when the racial divide opened onto the floor of the city council; the Chicago Cubs setting the city up for a fall; and Mayor Richard J. Daley setting the city up for an heir.

Royko wrote about them all and eclipsed them as the epitome of Sinatra's kind of town. Only the political insider or the true aficionado of urban politics recalls Daley, possibly the most powerful mayor of the 20th century, without benefit of *Boss*, Royko's 1971 book about "hizzoner" the mayor. Jimmy Breslin called it "the best book ever written about an American city by the best journalist of his time." By the late '80s, Royko's columns were appearing in more than 600 newspapers. It was hard to find a kitchen anywhere that didn't have a Royko column taped to the fridge. After Royko died of a brain aneurysm in April 1997, fellow *Chicago Tribune* columnist Bernie Lincicombe wrote, "Mike Royko was not the last of a breed, Mike Royko was the entire species."

The species is America's Dutch uncle, both because as a colloquialism it means the person who points out your flaws and excesses, and because Royko revelled in the ethnic stereotype. He lived by that shiv, as he would have put it, and he fell by that shiv.

In *One More Time: The Best of Mike Royko*, the first posthumous collection of his columns, we see Royko as the guy who won't leave the 'hood after everyone else has. He is Doc in *West Side Story*, the elder conscience who tells the Jets when they accost Anita after the fateful rumble, "When do you kids stop? You make this world lousy." He is Sal in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, the Italian whose pizza place burns down in the middle of a race riot during which he comes off looking as much the racist as the healer. The time lapse between the two movies, from 1961 to 1989, is roughly the span of Royko's career, and *One More Time* views Royko's tenure through a historical prism. The book is divided into four parts, one for each decade. Chicago is not forgotten, but it's not a Chicagoscape the reader gets. There's precious little on Chicago's patronage politics, on ward heelers, or on Mayor Daley, the stuff that put Royko's Chicago on the map.

It is Chicago as metaphor. Chicago was Royko's 'hood and he never left it; not for Washington, New York or, God forbid, the West Coast, even when offers were his for the taking. He was strictly and sanctimoniously outside the beltway. He's the guy who wouldn't tighten his tie, who spilled beer on his pants, and who was a newspaper's fanfare for the common man, though he wouldn't want you to think he knew anything about Aaron Copland.

We could use more Roykos now. His columns are prophetic. In the book's foreword, Studs Terkel, also of Chicago, also of the people, writes that it was "the real" that Royko searched out typically from the per-

JACK C. DOPPELT, *a professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, is co-author of the forthcoming book,* Nonvoters: America's No-Shows.

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spective of "somebody up against it." Royko saw America become laminated; its politicians phony, its values spiffed up and over-starched, its social discourse spooked by political correctness. It gnawed at him from his first column on.

Washington's preoccupation with impeachment would have delighted Royko the way an exterminator delights in smoking out basement pests. The sight of senators, representatives, pundits, all the President's people, and "the media jackals" spinning their webs of sincerity and immediacy would have had Royko salivating. Just as Royko used Chicago as metaphor for the proudly unpolished of society, he used politics as social barometer. He seldom covered politics and cared even less about policy. He cared about privilege, street-level fairness and hypocrisy. The pleasure in reading Royko is to see how he gets there.

His column on immunity for President Nixon quickly dispensed with the myth that no man is above the law. He quoted Nixon's own words. "Anyone should pay for violating the laws," Nixon had said about amnesty for draft resisters. Royko came out against prosecuting Nixon. "The country knew what it was getting when it made him president. He was elected by the darker side of the American conscience. His job was to put the brakes on the changes of the 1960s." Royko's tagline: "He did his job. Let him quit and go."

When it was time for Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill) to go, in April 1996, by way of prison, Royko said no one should take pleasure in Rosty's fall. Rosty had become a big fish, the perfect trophy for the ambitious in a society in which the rules change. "There is no one in our society more powerful—judge, governor, mayor, legislator, or even president—than a prosecutor. Local or federal."

Royko himself may have gotten too big or too ornery. He took comfort in his ethnic identity, so much comfort that he must have felt immune to shifting sensitivities. He loved to tweak ethnics as if it was all good competitive fun—my softball team against your team. When his columns overstepped, he generally issued gracious, if somewhat tart, apologies that covered his back until 1996.

A few columns that year tarnished him badly, even among his colleagues. There was one in January in which Royko went after a black woman who complained about being confused with a deadbeat dad named Maurice. Her name was Maurica and Royko, spelled Royko, figured he had license to poke fun at black names that "defy explanation." The next month, Royko, in going through the feigned motions of endorsing Patrick Buchanan for President, called Mexico a useless country except for its beaches and tequila, its leaders "corrupt pocket-stuffers," its people ambitionless, and Buchanan a wimp for not being more bold to keep America from being forced to dine on refried beans and naming all our children José.

He apologized sincerely for the former, writing that he truly wished he hadn't written it, but he could take only so much contrition. His apology for the latter was vintage Royko, only the vintage had soured. He apologized to illegal aliens, to Mexican drug lords, to Pat Buchanan, for using hyperbole, and he did it with venom. Neither column is in the book, though they are alluded to in Terkel's foreword in which he wrote that the demon in Royko was deflected in later years and "may have winged the sparrow rather than the vulture."

One More Time succeeds at rehabilitating Royko's reputation. Here's a guy who for 34 years turned the klieg lights on racism. On the "yahoos" of Hanover Park, Illinois, who in 1972 tried to keep a white professor out of a subdivision because he had an adopted black daughter. On Chicago's ethnic whites, including his Uncle Chester, whom he told in 1983, "Don't worry, (mayoral candidate) Harold Washington doesn't want to marry your sister." And on the O.J. Simpson trial, when Royko predicted the not guilty verdict because he doubted that in 1995 "there are many adult blacks who haven't had bad experiences with cops" and few who don't know people who've gotten a raw deal in a courtroom or a police station.

When Jackie Robinson died in October 1972, you felt Robinson and Royko as battery mates. Royko's column recalled the day Jackie Robinson played his first game in Wrigley Field in May 1947. There were "the wise men of the neighborhood," talking about what it would do to baseball, the white fans acting as if nothing unusual were happening, the black fans looking dignified in suits and straw hats, and the Cub player swerving to slam his foot on Robinson's as he was thrown out at first base. And there was Royko, a teenager, catching a foul ball hit by Robinson. A black man who was sitting next to Royko offered to pay him ten dollars. Royko took it, and for years, of course, wished he hadn't. Twenty-five years later, he was glad he had.

What changed for Royko in those twenty-five years was the superficial glitz of contemporary society. The ballplayers were in it for the money, the baby boomers were in it for the self-indulgence, and the politicians were in it for the polls. Whatever happened to the people behind the polls—to Royko's people?

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Madam Secretary

How Madeleine Albright's past shapes American foreign policy

By Michael Hirsh

MADELEINE KORBEL ALBRIGHT IS SURELY one of the most sympathetic figures ever to occupy the office of U.S. secretary of state. A refugee from Hitler and Stalin—and, in a strange way, from her family's Jewish past—Albright adopted her new homeland with all the zealous patriotism of the converted. Becoming an American was "the big, defining thing in my life," she tells Michael Dobbs in his doggedly reported, insightful new book, *Madeleine Albright: A 20th Century Odyssey* .Indeed, it is somehow telling that Albright, who arrived in America at age 11, quickly lost her foreign accent and later, as a policy-maker, became a Wilsonian moralist whose hero is WASP wise man Dean Acheson. On the other hand Henry Kissinger, who was just four years older when he immigrated, retained his Bavarian growl and turned into a *Realpolitician* with a fondness for Metternich.

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT: A 20th Century Odyssey
By Michael Dobbs
Henry Holt, $27.50

A loyal wife and doting mother, Albright floundered after her patrician husband, Joe Albright, stunned her in 1982 with the news that he was in love with another woman. Then she recovered and, showing the steeliness of character that Slobodan Milosevic has lately experienced, became a Democratic foreign policy adviser and organizer, raised three daughters, and ambitiously clawed her way to the top of the Washington hierarchy (leaving, in the process, amazingly few tracks). Today Albright has legions of friends in Washington and New York. She is, in person, funny and charmingly self-deprecating. And she is unquestionably a fine, deeply humane person—if a bit thin-skinned about criticism. In one especially vivid account, Dobbs describes Albright's futile attempts, as U.N. ambassador, to get Bill Clinton to intervene in Rwanda. Later, at her Senate confirmation hearing as secretary of state, Albright poignantly talked of her trip to the killing grounds, where she saw hundreds of skeletons—including "one that was only two feet long, about the size of my little grandson." (She was confirmed 99-0). Compared to the phlegmatic Dean Rusk, the dull and retiring Warren Christopher, and the dour John Foster Dulles (whose subordinates used to joke that "white wine should be served at the exact temperature of his blood"), Albright has been a delightful and inspiring public personality.

It is all the more discomfiting, therefore, to have to conclude that what may be shaping up as the biggest U.S. foreign policy mess of the 1990s—and, perhaps, a debacle that will someday rank with the Bay of Pigs—must be laid at Madeleine Albright's door. I refer, of course, to the Clinton administration's virtual war in Kosovo. One of the problems of U.S. foreign policy under Bill Clinton, who has been a domestic president from the start, is that it has been fractionalized. While Albright has done much to rescue state from the funk that Christopher left it in (in the first term even Ron Brown's Commerce Department was taking over its turf), too often U.S. foreign policy seems a discordant orchestra with no conductor. Under an informal division of labor, Albright handles Europe; National Security Advisor Sandy Berger does Asia (including, to his growing regret, China); and Strobe Talbott, the old Russia hand, deals with Moscow. Except for the Treasury Department, that is, which in the wake of financial contagion now runs half of the Russia relationship and virtually all of U.S.-Japan policy (except for the Pentagon's piece, of course). Then there is a skein of specialist ambassadors, like Dennis Ross on the Middle East, who are pretty much left to their own devices. While Berger, an old friend of the president's, seems to have Clinton's ear more than the secretary of state does on many issues, overall the organizational chart looks like a game of Twister.

This makes it hard, on the whole, to judge Albright's performance, except when it comes to the Balkans. There's no question that the United State's Kosovo policy has been largely Albright's baby, at least since Richard Holbrooke's U.N. nomination became bogged down in an endless ethics probe last year. It was

MICHAEL HIRSH *is diplomatic correspondent for* Newsweek.

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Albright who, in a relentless lobbying campaign beginning in January, persuaded Clinton and NATO that it was time to take it to Milosevic, resulting in the hard-line "NATO peacekeepers-or-NATO bombs" ultimatum which led to war. And there's no question that, during the course of the negotiations, she (and everyone else) miscalculated the reactions of both the Kosovars and Milosevic, as well as the pressures the Serbian people would place on him not to let Kosovo go, despite all the warning signs. One can only wonder what must be going through the secretary's mind every day as NATO's antiseptic air war continues while Kosovars are hounded, killed, and raped on the ground. The administration insists that it's not over yet. But make no mistake: Averting a humanitarian catastrophe was the central rationale for being in Kosovo. There was never any other strategic reason to go to bat for Albanian guerrillas. And that catastrophe has already happened. The United States went to war, it appears, on the riskiest of bets: either that Milosevic would allow a province that was crucial to his political survival to be occupied by foreign troops, or that for the first time in history air power alone would prevail. And yet, almost unbelievably, the administration had no contingency plan if these bets didn't pan out; it didn't even put a humanitarian peacekeeping force in place on the borders. NATO, whose expansion Albright has lovingly cultivated, now finds its credibility badly threatened in its 50th anniversary year.

Albright hardly deserves all the blame for these miscalculations. Let's be fair: Dean Acheson had Harry Truman behind him. Albright has Bill Clinton—a man who, endlessly splitting the difference on almost every policy he touches, apparently believes in bloodless war. It is the interaction between the two of them, I believe, that is crucial to understanding the mistakes of the Kosovo conflict. Dobbs, the *Washington Post* reporter who broke the story on Albright's Jewish origins in 1997, goes into fascinating detail about Albright's family history and her Munich-nurtured world view, which has led her to push for a more activist approach to the use of U.S. power. Since reading the book I have developed a kind of Dick-and-Perry theory about Kosovo. While Clinton and Albright may have intervened in Kosovo with the best of motives, their thinking and styles were so mismatched that together they created a chimera of a policy. If Albright, the woman who famously upbraided Colin Powell in 1993—"What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?" she told him—had had her way in the Balkans, intervention would have been early, severe, and swift. That might well have kept Milosevic in check. If, on the other hand, Clinton hadn't been distracted by impeachment and had thrown himself into the Kosovo affair in January—as he did at last October's Wye Mideast talks—he surely would have hatched a Holbrooke-style compromise with Milosevic. Such a patchwork solution, arguably, might have worked to avert the worst of the humanitarian tragedy, even as late as March. (Even the ragged cease-fire of last fall was better than what we seem to be ending up with.) The disastrous disconnect occurred when Clinton tried to conduct a timid, post-Vietnam war to enforce his secretary of state's World War II-engendered hard-line diplomacy. This produced the worst of all policy tools: an ultimatum with few teeth. (Clinton even announced to Milosevic just how few teeth he had in his March 24 speech, when he foreclosed ground troops.) Indeed, given the limits of U.S. interests in the Balkans, it is tempting to conclude that something very like a Munich—a partition—was needed here. Let's face it: Milosevic didn't have the intention or capacity to rampage, Hitler-like, through Europe. All he ever wanted was his rump Yugoslavia, where he employed Hitler-like tactics, but a negotiated settlement might have kept the lid on his ethnic cleansing campaigns. And Albright, because of the personal history that Dobbs documents so well, was probably the least likely person to employ such a negotiating trick.

Unfortunately, most readers of Dobbs' book will have to tease out such conclusions for themselves. It has all the virtues of the classic reporter's book: accurate, detailed reporting, including one phenomenal section in which Dobbs manages to recreate the transports that took Albright's relatives to the camps. But the book also has most of the usual defects of the genre—mainly, a lack of historical context woven into the biography, which did so much to distinguish predecessors like *The Wise Men* and *The Power Broker*. Much of the book deals with the issue of how much Albright knew or didn't know about her Jewish lineage—an interesting question, but neither here nor there when it comes to understanding her significance as U.S.'s top diplomat. Indeed, Dobbs devotes just 42 pages of his 466-page book to Albright's time as secretary, and just 19 pages to her four years as U.N. ambassador. One telling anecdote in this back section, which almost seems an afterthought, came in 1993. Shortly after being named U.N. ambassador, Albright gave a major policy speech at Georgetown in which she declared, "We do not win when we bomb our enemies into the ground, because we only create new generations of malcontents." That, it turns out, was very good advice. One would like to know why, when it came to Kosovo, she didn't take it. ●

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The Peacemaker

How George Mitchell helped the Irish put "the troubles" behind them

By Fred Barbash

MAKING PEACE
By George J. Mitchell
Knopf, $24

In Making Peace, George Mitchell recalls a tense day in 1998 when haggling between the British and Irish governments held up the conclusion to the Northern Ireland peace talks, which he was chairing. The crucial deadline loomed, the drumroll had begun, when the bad news came that the two governments were stalled.

Mitchell knew the press would insist on knowing what was going wrong and who was responsible. He was taken aback when officials from Dublin and London asked him to take the rap and accept full responsibility for the delay—so they didn't get blamed. With great angst (the former senate majority leader, as those of us who've covered him know, is a serious straight arrow, unaccustomed to lying or even fibbing), he and his two co-peace makers agreed to go out and dissemble. "We understood," he writes, that "absorbing blame was one of the reasons we were there."

In saying that, Mitchell pinpoints the real function of the three-member international commission he headed, which ultimately helped produce Northern Ireland's Good Friday Agreement last year. This was not really mediation; or shuttle diplomacy; or Holbrookean head-knocking. The Mitchell commission essentially provided cover for the politicians in the region. It shielded them from the consequences of doing the right thing, which meant shedding encrusted principles and repositioning, while retaining their dignity—and their constituencies. Concessions which would have been impossible if proffered to the enemy could be effectively laundered through Mitchell and his colleagues, who would, when necessary, "absorb the blame."

We forgive him for fibbing. We instead congratulate George Mitchell for his role in Northern Ireland. He is a tremendous hero, in ways most Americans have yet to recognize, in part because the Norwegians foolishly left his name off when they gave the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 to the leaders of the two largest Catholic and Protestant political parties who helped negotiate the agreement. Mitchell, who had retired from the senate and turned down such plums as an appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, was a special advisor to the president on Northern Ireland in December, 1995 when the White House relayed the request from the governments of Britain and Ireland asking him to chair a committee of three, including a retired Canadian general and a former prime minister of Finland, which rather strangely became known as "the international body."

Its first mission was to resolve, or better yet, help divert, an impossible dispute over whether or not Northern Ireland paramilitaries should "decommission" their bombs and guns. After that was accomplished, the same three were asked to chair negotiations among the many Catholic and Protestant factions in Northern Ireland designed to produce the equally impossible dream of a "lasting peace" in the province.

They told him it would last six months. It took the better part of three years. Most of the talk during that period made arguments about the shape of tables seem glamorous. Northern Ireland's politicians are notorious windbags and Mitchell had to sit through, and look interested in, the insufferable huffings, puffings and ritual incantations of the likes of the Rev. Ian Paisley, leader of the never-say-yes wing of the Protestant community; Gerry Adams, president of the never-say-die Irish republican organization known affectionately by British intelligence as Sinn Fein/IRA, not to mention dozens of lesser known figures repeating lines memorized long ago about all the injustices and indignities heaped upon them since sixteen hundred and whatever.

Fred Barbash *was* The Washington Post's *London correspondent from 1994-1997. During that period, he also covered the Northern Ireland peace negotiations. He is currently a business editor at the* Post.

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At the beginning, Mitchell had to sit in a room and listen by closed circuit as small-time pols debated his worthiness to chair the talks.

He put up with mean-spirited lies in the press about the integrity of a trusted staff member, spread by opponents of the talks and sustained by cagey no-comments from British authorities. He fought a pattern of damaging leaks about the negotiations he believes were generated from inside Britain's Northern Ireland Office, which administers the province and included a number of old-line types who simply did not want the process to succeed.

Intermittently, the Irish Republican Army would set off a bomb; Protestant terrorists would murder a Catholic taxi driver; and many of the same politicians who were pretending to want a peaceful settlement did their best to stir up old hostilities with hateful comments and belligerent sectarian parades.

Mitchell, meanwhile, completely sacrificed his personal life, missing the death of a beloved brother, his wife's miscarriage (on the next try, they had a son, Andrew, whose birth he did not miss), and the comfortable easy life to which he was richly entitled after serving as a U.S. Attorney, a federal judge, and a uniquely respected U.S. senator from Maine.

Frankly, the political parties in Northern Ireland and the two governments didn't deserve George Mitchell.

The people did, however, and the palpable desire of ordinary folks on both sides to put "the troubles" behind them was what kept Mitchell going.

This is a nuts and bolts book, a case study in conflict resolution, but there is a subtext of great passion. This man spent all this time and energy helping heal a little corner of a small island because the children there were suffering. The birth of his son during the peace process only stiffened his resolve—he learned that 61 babies were born in Northern Ireland on that same day and vowed that, for them, he would keep going, keep talking, keep pushing and prodding and nagging and cajoling until the job was done.

The achievement is worth studying for future applications. But the timing was unique—at that point in the course of a prolonged and intractable conflict, when many, if not all, of the combatants had exhausted themselves and wished desperately, albeit secretly, that the whole argument would just go away. They were ready to stop, but had suffered so many wounds, sworn so many oaths, and uttered "never" so often, that they were finding it difficult to take advantage of the moment.

The Irish Republican Army declared a cessation of hostilities in the late summer of 1994, meaning an end to organized terrorism against the British government and various innocent bystanders. On Oct. 13, 1994, Protestant terrorists soon joined what was being called "the peace process" by declaring their own cease-fire. Belfast had a first truly joyous, fear-free Christmas in decades; troop patrols left the streets. But the various sides in this complicated equation—including the British government—seemed unable to move sufficiently from previous positions to take the sort of concrete steps that could lead to a more stable peace in the province. The "international body's" recommendation that substantive negotiations run parallel to discussions on the "decommissioning of weapons" got a conservative Prime Minister out of a deep hole he had dug by insisting on progress on the weapons issue before allowing all the Northern Ireland parties into talks.

Its deft handling of the sensibilities of David Trimble, head of the Ulster Unionist Party, allowed the Protestant politician to engage in unprecedented dialogue with archenemy Sinn Fein in a way that limited the political damage to Trimble and his party. And by allowing the extreme wing of Protestant politics, led by Rev. Ian Paisley, to stalk away from the peace talks rather than give in to its demands, the commission eliminated from the process the single greatest obstructionist force in the province. Had Paisley remained, he could have wrecked the entire enterprise.

More than a year after the voters of Northern Ireland ratified the peace plan on May 22, 1998, implementation is incomplete and behind schedule. Protestant and Catholic parties are still struggling to organize a Northern Ireland Assembly in Belfast to function as a "power sharing" regional government for the province. Mitchell and the political leadership of Northern Ireland, Britain, and Ireland calculated that the public's palpable yearning for an end to hostilities and for a normal life would overcome a negative reaction to a Paisley walkout. They're still arguing about the decommissioning of weapons. Violence continues at the extremes. Northern Ireland, after all, is still a place where people will drive a hundred miles out of their way "to receive an insult," as Mitchell was warned early in the process.

The peace process is, as always, behind schedule and may yet face new crises. But it has already set a record for success and, to some extent, has replaced weary resignation with hope. The process is bumpy, but it lives, and that is hugely important. ●

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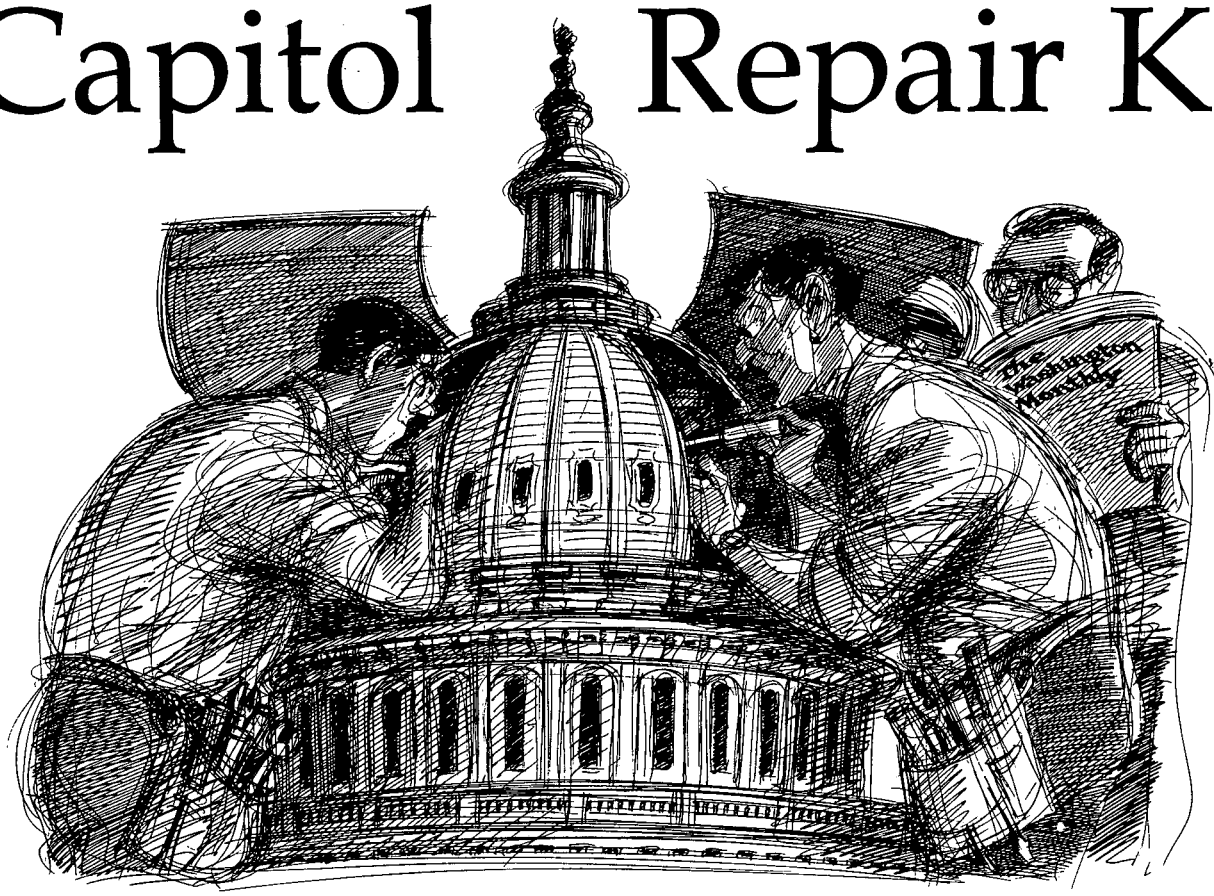

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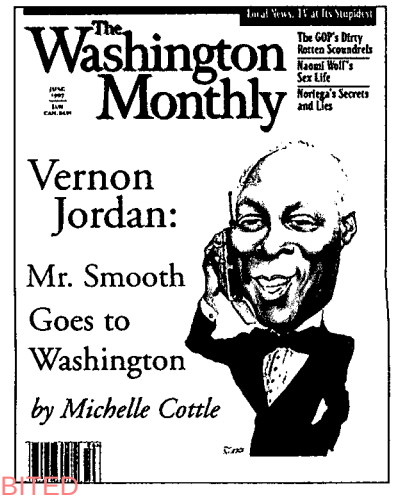

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Political Booknotes

Understanding Globalization

Paul Krugman

EVERY FEW YEARS A BOOK comes along that perfectly expresses the moment's conventional wisdom—that says pretty much what everybody else in the chattering classes is saying, but does it in a way that manages to sound fresh and profound. Notable examples are Paul Kennedy's 1989 *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, with its theme of "imperial overstretch", of a United States declining under the weight of its military commitments; or Lester Thurow's 1992 *Head to Head*, with its vision of a desperate commercial struggle among the advanced industrial nations, and of a United States unable to compete effectively because of its naive faith in free markets. It is already clear that Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*—which tells the story of the new global economy, and of a United States triumphant because it is the nation best suited to capitalize on that global economy—is the latest in the series. The question is whether Friedman's vision will date as quickly as those of his predecessors.

THE LEXUS & THE OLIVE TREE
by Thomas Friedman
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, $27.50

It's possible to summarize what Friedman has to say fairly quickly, mainly because it's what you read in just about every issue of *Business Week*. Information technology, he tells us, has made the world a small place, in which ideas and money can move almost instantly across borders. This smaller world richly rewards countries and societies that meet its needs—which is to say places that have strong property rights, open minds, and a flexible attitude; but it inflicts devastating punishment on those who fail to live up to global standards. Old-fashioned power politics is becoming increasingly obsolete because it conflicts with the imperatives of global capitalism. We are heading for a world that is basically democratic, because you can't keep 'em down on the farm once they have Internet access, and basically peaceful, because George Soros will pull out his money if you rattle your saber.

This story is told via hundreds of anecdotes, most of them involving the author. (Someone once defined an intellectual as a person who can utter more than two consecutive sentences that do not mention himself or anyone he knows. This definition might have been specifically crafted to exclude Friedman; as a reader-reviewer at Amazon.com—hey, the Internet really can be a democratizing force!—puts it, he "uses the first person singular the way most writers use commas.") But these anecdotes, annoying as they may be, do serve a purpose: By personalizing the story, they make it seem more convincing to readers who find analytical abstractions off-putting. Of course, as the history of global visions teaches us, what is convincing is not necessarily true. Has Friedman got it right?

A good place to start is with something that he almost certainly has wrong. If there is one single fact that transformed America's image of its place in the world, that made earlier vintage global visions look so foolish in retrospect, it is the contrast between our own unexpected prosperity and Japan's even more unexpected economic malaise. There isn't really any careful discussion of what went wrong with Japan in this book, but the clear implication of his various parables and metaphors is that Japan is in trouble because it is hidebound and inefficient, and that this makes it unfit for the global economy. Yet, as Friedman himself points out, Japan's export sector remains world-class (In fact, it's sort of bizarre that he names a symbol of Japanese manufacturing prowess, rather than some American specialty like software or entertainment, in the book's title.) What has faltered in Japan is production for the domestic market—and while this production is and always has been inefficient, the immediate problem is not inadequate supply but inadequate demand. Put in a nutshell, the Japanese simply save too much; that is, although Friedman's only reference to Keynes is a disparaging one (he's a "defining economist of the Cold War system"), Japan is in fact suffering the most classically Keynesian crisis since the 1930s. And the United States, for its part, is not doing well because it is spectacularly successful in global markets. Except for the entertainment industry, U.S. producers are still remarkably bad at exporting, and we seem certain to mark the millennium by running the biggest trade deficit ever measured. We have been buoyed by an astonishing surge of consumer spending, which for reasons that probably have only a bit to do with globalization has not led to a corresponding surge in inflation.

This is not a minor quibble. If the role-reversal between the United States and Japan has more to do with old-fashioned macro-economics than with the inexorable new logic of globalization, maybe the rules of the game haven't changed as much as Friedman thinks—and maybe, also, America's winning streak is not forever. Did somebody say "bubble economy"?

If Friedman misses the point about what went wrong in Japan, he is also on shaky ground when it comes to the world's other great recent reversal of fortune: the financial crisis in emerging markets. It takes a while to figure out what he is really saying about the "electronic herd," but I think his bottom line is that, in the end, countries get treated as they deserve: If capital flight devastates your economy, it must have been fundamentally flawed to begin with. Now this is a very debatable proposition: The sheer extent of global contagion has convinced many economists that nations can be subject to "self-fulfilling crises," in which a loss of confidence creates an econom-

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ic and political collapse that validates investors' pessimism. Was Indonesia simply a disaster waiting to happen? Or was it an imperfect but reasonably well-managed economy, which might well have grown out of its problems if its creditors had not stampeded for the exit? We all know that in the days before the FDIC, a run by depositors could break even a fundamentally sound bank. Why can't it happen to countries?

The point is that Friedman does not give the big question about globalization—whether it is a force for instability on a scale that will swamp its gains—a hearing. He therefore prejudges the question of whether the globalizing trend of the last 20 years will continue, or whether today's wide-open world will, like the global economy of the early 20th century—which seemed equally unstoppable to contemporaries—eventually be reined in by financial crisis and political restrictions. I don't know the answer to this question, but neither does he.

Maybe I have just been in this business too long, and have seen too many global visions come and go. In 1979 everyone knew that it was a Malthusian world, that the energy crisis was just the beginning of a global struggle for ever-scarcer resources. In 1989 everyone knew that the big story was the struggle for the key manufacturing sectors, and that the winners would be those countries with coherent top-down industrial policies, whose companies weren't subject to the short-term pressures of financial markets. And in 1999 everybody knows that it's a global knowledge economy, where only those countries that tear down their walls, and open themselves to the winds of electronic commerce, will succeed. I wonder what everybody will know in 2009?

PAUL KRUGMAN *is a professor of economics at MIT.*

Nonlethal Arms

Gregg Easterbrook

WHEN U.S. SOLDIERS STAGED their ill-fated attempt to rescue American hostages from Iran in April 1980, word circulated in Washington that they weren't actually carrying guns. Commentators and pundits were so stunned by the notion that the God-fearing President Jimmy Carter had ordered the use of force that they assumed there must have been some other plan. Soldiers and air crews, rumor had it, were equipped with a top-secret knockout gas that would have incapacitated any Iranian resistance harmlessly. This story was received credibly in Washington establishment circles until photographs of wrecked helicopters showed machine guns mounted in their doors. It turned out that operational details for the final hours of the planned raid included diversionary bombing attacks on Iranian military targets while Air Force gunships circled the rescue site, "hosing down" the streets with 40mm cannon fire to kill anything that moved. A nonlethal raid? Not exactly.

Of course, planners for the 1980 raid might have incorporated nonlethal weapons, if they'd had them. The same goes for planners for the 1983 invasion of Grenada, the 1989 attack on Panama, the 1991 Gulf war, the 1993 Somalia and Haiti operations, the 1995 Bosnia occupation, the 1999 campaign against Serbia, and the list goes on. Military commanders can't use nonlethal weapons because they basically don't have any, other than tear gas and rubber bullets, which are useful for breaking up crowds but not in battle. Except in the movies, there is nothing remotely close to knockout gas.

FUTURE WAR:
Non-Lethal Weapons in 21st Century Warfare
By John Alexander
St. Martin's, $24.95

John Alexander, a retired Army colonel with experiences as varied as Green Beret commands in Vietnam and a stint at the Council on Foreign Relations, hopes that will change. His *Future War* is a timely, intriguing book, one that advocates a broad-reaching American commitment to develop and field nonlethal weapons. Generally the book offers a serious argument, though *Future War* does contain so many references to science-fiction movies that it sometimes veers toward silly. Alexander, who's apparently done some Hollywood consulting, comes perilously to suggesting that if something has been in a Michael Crichton movie, that shows it can actually exist: a pointed lapse in logic for an otherwise earnest work.

Alexander thinks nonlethal arms make sense for two reasons: First because technology is making them possible, second because in decades to come it seems much more likely that Western militaries will be involved in low-grade conflicts and peacekeeping, which means operating around civilians, than engaged in traditional heavy battle. From its founding in 1945 to 1990, Alexander points out, the United Nations authorized the use of force six times; since then it has voted in favor of 61 acts of military engagement, almost all executed primarily by U.S. forces. For both humanitarian and pragmatic political reasons, nonlethal arms would be the weapons of choice for most of the kinds of actions that the United Nations authorizes.

Alexander, a great enthusiast for nonlethal arms, sees extensive promise in the idea. Since the mid-1970s, British units have broken up many riots in Northern Ireland using rubber bullets, which is a big step up from firing real bullets into crowds, as was done on Bloody Sunday in 1972. Some police departments now use the Taser, which temporarily incapacitates using electricity. During the second Somalia operation, in 1994, Marine units equipped with new laser devices found that if they simply lit up a militiaman's chest with the spooky green light of a laser sight, he'd instantly become cooperative and drop his gun. So at least a few exercises of force have been accomplished using nonlethal means.

But in the main, nonlethal arms are still unimpressive. Rubber cartridges, for example, must be fired from precisely the correct distance: too far away and they just sting, too close and they become lethal. Guns that shoot nets or bean-bags or globs of super-sticky foam have all kinds of practical limitations compared to bullets, including limited range and long reload times if you miss. Lasers can

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be used to dazzle or blind—the Chinese are selling developing world customers a blinding weapon with the actual name ZM87 Portal Laser Disturber—but can also be defeated by mirrors and goggles. (Sales pitches for nonlethal weapons tend to assume that they will be employed against people who are not using countermeasures, yet the history of warfare shows that almost everybody quickly adapts countermeasures.) Nonlethal "chaff" dispensers fired at Serbian transformer stations have dimmed Belgrade's electricity during the Kosovo conflict, but the effect has been temporary, whereas a few bombs targeted on power plants would have darkened the country for months.

Alexander advocates such exotic ideas as dropping canisters of superacids on the roads being used by enemy forces, to wreck truck tires and tank treads; spraying enemy positions with super-Teflon, so that soldiers slip and fall in a 21st century Three Stooges routine; blasting opposition positions with insect pheromones, in order to attract every bug from miles around, forcing enemy soldiers to spend their time itching and scratching. You can imagine how enthusiastic you'd be about these ideas as a field commander, if your other option were simply blowing the enemy up. *Future War* even suggests that someday there will be biological agents that attack stuff, not people—designer bugs that would eat away at the other sides rubber or petroleum.

Well, maybe, but how much can one bug eat? The lack of any knockout gas suggests how impractical many ideas for nonlethal weapons are. Consider the one known chemical knockout technique—anesthesia. It works but requires extremely precise doses, monitoring of pulse and blood pressure and blood oxygen saturation; even a tiny slip-up kills the patient. Try to imagine any chemical that could be lobbed in artillery shells in bulk for knockout purposes. A big enough blast would be too potent, and would kill the targets; too little, and they'd whiff it without effect. Most nonlethal weaponry schemes suffer from basic drawbacks like this, and it's hard to see how they will be overcome.

That does not, of course, mean nonlethal weapons will never happen. During the 1980s, Ronald Reagan was excessively optimistic about antimissile weapons, wanting to fund a complete national antimissile at a time when there wasn't a single piece of working hardware in this category. Yet although Reagan's understanding of the technology was poor, his instinct was correct—the ability to shoot down nuclear missiles would be welcome, and eventually will be developed, partly because Reagan prodded the military system into taking this idea seriously. Though there is no nonlethal weapon today, prodding the Pentagon to search for one could ultimately prove as useful as Reagan's insistence on antimissile research. *Future War* is right to advocate this idea, and represents a valuable reminder that the technological wizards of the American defense establishment should devote more of their considerable brainpower to that which does not kill.

GREGG EASTERBROOK, *a contributing editor at* The Washington Monthly, *is a senior editor at* The New Republic.

Media Magnate

Matthew Cooper

CHRISTOPHER OGDEN IS RIGHT up there with Dominick Dunne as one of our best chroniclers of the rich. *Life of the Party* is his dishy biography of Pamela Harriman, the late doyenne of the Democratic party. This time Ogden has set his sights on the Annenbergs, one of America's foremost media families. At first the Annenbergs seem like a slightly dull choice for Ogden. Walter Annenberg and his father, Moses, never captured the popular imagination à la William Randolph Hearst. And Annenberg's publications—the *Daily Racing Form*, *TV Guide*, *Seventeen*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*—never had the cachet of the phalanx of Conde Nast's glossies. But this is a great read—both as rogue-to-riches yarn and for what it reveals about American publishing.

LEGACY
A Biography of Walter and Moses Annenberg
by Christopher Ogden
Little, Brown & Co., $29.95

Working with access to family correspondence and records, Ogden tells the story of the Annenbergs from their escape from the turn-of-the-century pogroms to their rise as America's biggest living philanthropists. Moses, a poor immigrant, worked his way up as a distributor for Hearst, coming up with sales gimmicks for newspaper subscribers—like giving away spoons with their state's name on them. Branching out on his own, he acquired the *Daily Racing Form* and made it into the indispensable bible of trackgoers at a time when American sports was a trifecta of baseball, boxing, and playing the ponies. Today, alas, most tracks are moribund and only clear a profit because of slot machines.

Moses' idea was simple: give bettors a statistical guide to the horses—their performances, bloodlines, etc.—and specialize it for each track. By the '30s, Moses had become a big deal in American publishing, having acquired the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. A Republican who helped bring down the Democratic Governor in Harrisburg, Moses became a thorn in the side of FDR. In a little-known and ugly aspect of the New Deal, FDR—along with tough guys like Harold Ickes—went after Moses on tax evasion charges. Ogden irrefutably demonstrates that it was a political vendetta, even though Moses skirted the law. He died behind bars.

Walter took over from his father. After the war, he spied the rise of a "teen" culture with disposable income. He started *Seventeen*, which became immensely profitable. Later, he picked up a television publication at a time when newspapers myopically ignored television and transformed it into *TV Guide*—still the No. 1 magazine in America.

What made the younger Annenberg exceptional was his philanthropy and his smarts in using his donations to leverage more. He pledged $50 million to the United Negro College Fund on the condition the organization raise $200 million. Much to their own surprise, they did.

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He gave $500 million dollars to improve public schools. His art donations to the Met represented the greatest single windfall for an American museum in the second half of the 20th century.

Annenberg was a brilliant businessman but a spotty journalist. Insecure, he blacklisted people when he ran the *Inquirer* paper, refusing to print their names. This could be absurd when it came to people like Milton Shapp, who went on to be governor. The paper is far, far better today as part of the Knight-Ridder chain. Still, you have to miss the quirkiness of the pre-corporate media. Annenberg's rise reminds us how interesting the American press is when it's owned by families who are less concerned about immediate profits than are shareholder-driven corporations.

Sure, the Annenbergs were never the journalistic equals of the Sulzbergers or the Grahams (my bosses). But with *TV Guide* and *Seventeen* they were real innovators—and fun to watch.

MATTHEW COOPER, *a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly, *is a deputy Washington bureau chief for* Newsweek.

Robber Banker

Robert Weissman

THE PROSPECT THAT IN A hundred years' time another Jean Strouse may write a book called *Gates* must put a huge smile on the face of the nation's leading contemporary Robber Baron.

Strouse's extraordinarily detailed narrative of Morgan's life contains one overriding theme: Throughout his career, J.P. Morgan operated with the firm conviction that what he was doing was in the best interest of America. To be sure, Strouse explains that Morgan sought to make money, but she emphasizes that he always acted to advance his class' interests, which he viewed as identical with the nation's.

"Morgan himself had been 'unchangeably pledged' to what he regarded as 'efforts for the public welfare'—supplying capital to U.S. markets—all his professional life," writes Strouse in one illustrative passage. Morgan was convinced that "the country's economic welfare was in the hands of his own generation's leading financiers, and that he had a mandate to consolidate control of its industrial and capital resources."

This is an important conclusion, and one that certainly merits inclusion in a Morgan biography, but it is not sufficiently insightful, interesting, or significant to be the organizing theme of a book of this ambition. After all, virtually every person, and especially those in power, believes they are doing the right thing—and is capable of spinning justifying tales to rationalize, to others and to themselves, activities that others judge harshly.

Throughout his career, Morgan was the target of serious, hard-hitting, and sophisticated criticism from both Populists and Progressives. They charged Morgan and the empire over which he ruled with political corruption, violation of antitrust proscriptions, price gouging, and other abuses of economic power to advance narrow Wall Street aims at the expense of the broader public interest. Strouse acknowledges these charges, but she never fully explains them.

It should be noted, however, that Strouse includes much anecdotal information supporting some of the popular criticism of the Robber Barons and the Money Trust. She provides clear evidence of Morgan engaging in bribery to forestall railroad and other regulations in Minnesota, for example. Morgan also made massive campaign contributions—$150,000 just to Roosevelt in 1904. And especially towards the end of his career, Strouse recounts, Morgan's operations began a concerted effort to buy up the media and to slant press coverage through public relations campaigns. When Morgan died in 1913, newspapers across the country reported with regal respect on the evangelical opening lines of his will.

MORGAN: American Financier
by Jean Strouse
Random House, $34.95

"The press response was 'not a matter of chance,'" Strouse quotes Tom Lamont, a close Morgan associate, as explaining: "'We worked over the matter with a good deal of care, and prepared a 2,000 word summary of the will, which the A.P. used without change and telegraphed all over the country.'"

On the even more important issues of economic concentration and monetary policy, Strouse does plainly lay out evidence of how Morgan brokered mergers and compacts among railroads to lessen competition, organized the creation of U.S. Steel and promoted price-fixing in the steel industry, formed a banking trio (with First National and City Bank) that exerted staggering control over national capital markets and successfully lobbied in defense of the gold standard.

But this all passes without critical commentary. Strouse seems to accept, without really supporting, Morgan's views that economic consolidation was necessary to promote efficiency; that centralization and de facto private regulation was required to calm overly turbulent markets; and that tight money (through maintenance of the gold standard) advanced U.S. national interests.

The overall effect of Strouse's failure to fully flesh out or challenge criticism of Morgan, while also elaborating Morgan's activities and point of view, is to leave the reader with a highly favorable impression of the great banker.

Instead of a critical review or even defense of Morgan's activities, the book offers a catalogue of the events of his life. This overly long catalogue, the product of a serious research effort and review of vast personal and business papers, includes both his professional activities and a very detailed accounting of his social life—paintings and monographs acquired, yachts built, trips taken, mistresses maintained, museums supported. Strouse is not shy about revealing Morgan's personal faults, from hypochondria to effective abandonment of his second wife, but the portrayal is nonetheless at all times sympathetic.

Yet for all the intimate and exquisite detail of this 700-plus page tome,

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Morgan the man rarely comes alive. That's probably more Morgan's fault than Strouse's. Morgan was inarticulate and shy, and rarely revealed his feelings or even the basis for his business decisions. As portrayed, he was a man of action, not words. The most lively section of the book comes toward the end, especially in two chapters called "Singular Women" and "Portraits," in which Strouse conveys impressions of Morgan through the eyes of others, or through Morgan's interactions with others. Here the author is able to draw on material from characters with more verbal acumen, and the book's pace picks up considerably. It is also where she introduces Belle da Costa Greene, who managed Morgan's personal library and is the most interesting character of the book, an African-American woman who "passed" as Portuguese. From Belle Greene's letters, the reader gets some feel of Morgan's emotional suffering (he was prone to depression) and loneliness, and the richest sense of Morgan's view that he was a builder of the economy.

Unfortunately, *Morgan: American Financier* does not offer such a human perspective, or a rigorous analysis, of Morgan's effect on the economy or on the millions of farmers and workers who saw Morgan not as a builder, but as a destructive force. Morgan may have seen himself as having "a mandate to consolidate control of [the country's] industrial and capital resources," but it certainly was not a mandate from the people.

They should have been given some voice in this book.

ROBERT WEISSMAN *is editor of the Washington, D.C.-based Multinational Monitor and coauthor of* Corporate Creditors *(Common Courage Press, 1999).*

The Perception Gap

Charles William Maynes

STEVEN KULL AND I.M. Destler have performed an important service for those interested in this country's foreign policy. In *Misreading the Public*, they have revealed two dirty secrets about official Washington: its low regard for the views of the American people in the field of foreign policy and the consequent official failure to prepare the public for the kind of world role this country by its size and traditions ought to play. The research Kull and Destler have carried out makes it clear that the failure is bipartisan in nature and the consequences reach beyond any single administration. If readers are concerned that the United States is ending up with a pinched global vision and is falling far short of the ideals for which this country ought to stand, they can start to understand why by reading this book.

Jimmy Carter used to claim he wanted a government as "good" as the American people, but few others in either party in Washington would seek such a government, particularly in the field of foreign affairs. As Kull and Destler document, senior officials in both parties regard the American people as narrow-minded and self-interested isolationists scornful of and unwilling to cooperate with others. The irony—or the tragedy—is that official Washington almost totally misreads the preferences of the electorate they pretend to represent.

To establish the wisdom gap between the elite and the people, Kull and Destler developed an ambitious research agenda. First, they interviewed 88 policy practitioners in order to sketch out a policy maker's x-ray of public attitudes on such questions as support for the United Nations, foreign aid, U.S. participation in international peacekeeping, and the size of the defense budget. The group consisted of 12 members of Congress, 16 congressional staff assistants, 19 officials in the Executive Branch, 18 leading journalists and 18 leaders from the non-governmental community.

Second, they hired pollsters from both the Bush and Clinton campaigns to conduct national surveys to determine whether the public actually held the views the elite attributed to them.

Third, when it turned out beyond any doubt than the public was in fact much more internationalist and progressive than the elite believed—that it voiced strong support for the United Nations, that it wanted the U.S. Government to pay its U.N. dues, that it would favor U.S. support of international peacekeeping, that it favored a vigorous aid budget, and that it wanted to reduce, not increase the defense budget—Kull and Destler went back to the leaders and asked them to explain the discrepancies.

Finally, with the help of a new set of questions formulated after discussions with the leadership group about the results of the earlier polling, Kull and Destler sent their pollsters out again to retest the public's views under a series of much more demanding and challenging premises. Again, the results were unambiguous: The public is much more internationalist and progressive than the elite asserts or believes. They even tested public opinion in the congressional districts of four members of congress who had consistently voted an anti-progressive record and confirmed that the electorate in these highly conservative districts also turned out to be as internationalist and progressive as the rest of the nation.

Policy practitioners were stunned by the research. But one suspects—though Kull and Destler do not say this—that few of the policy practitioners will now change their policy behavior to reflect the views of the public they serve.

Which leads to the interesting question: Why?

Individuals elected to Congress are supposed to assume two roles: steward and representative. Is it that the elite sees itself as the steward of a foreign policy vision the public does not share? Not at all. Paradoxically, the elite claims that it wishes the public had the views that Kull and Destler's research documents they do have. Why then do our representatives not represent?

Kull and Destler advance a number of explanations, but the one they seem to believe is the most important involves the interplay between Congress and the two other main power centers in Washington: the executive branch and the press. Simplified, their theory is that congressmen run for office primarily on domestic issues and thus feel free to express views on foreign policy that the public does not

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share; congressmen know that elections can swing over a small number of votes so they pay attention to those who speak loudest even if they do not represent a majority view; the executive branch and the press, in turn, look to Congress as the barometer of public opinion; if the Congress says that is what the public wants, then that is what the public wants; finally, the three pillars of the Washington establishment chase one another's tails in deciding what the country "thinks" about the foreign policy issues of the day.

MISREADING THE PUBLIC: The Myth pf a New Isolationism
by Steven Kull and I.M. Destler
Brookings, $44.95

Kull and Destler offer considerable anecdotal evidence to buttress their thesis, but the question arises: How does the process of tail chasing get started in the first place? Why is the policy circle so closed from the beginning?

The answer, I believe, lies in what the French call "deformation professionale." In our universities and think tanks the "realist" school reigns supreme. Each generation of budding diplomats and commentators is taught to regard any other point of view as illegitimate. Anyone in the field learns early that foreign policy is designed to be an elite, secretive, and highly professional domain where the specialists are supposed to know best and where the role for the rest of us is to admire and follow. Thinkers as different as George Kennan and Henry Kissinger have written brilliant books advancing that thesis.

And in fact diplomacy and democracy are uneasy partners. Diplomacy has always been the domain of kings, dictators and presidents. They, supposedly, had the information, the larger vision, and the responsibility. By this conception, the people are a distraction and their representatives, if they express the people views too faithfully, a positive danger. The people are there to follow, not to guide.

Anyone who has served in a senior position in the U.S. Government knows how quickly he or she is marginalized if he refers too insistently to such "soft" considerations as development, disarmament, or democracy, or for that matter concern for the larger international order. It is only after the decisions are set in place that the leadership turns to the soft considerations to gain public support for the "realist" decision already taken.

Can this change? *Misreading the Public* marks a watershed because at least no one can any longer claim ignorance of what is going on. Nevertheless, the new generation of diplomats like their elders is schooled in the traditions of "realism." The best hope for change must come from a president who is so committed to the ideals of this country that he will find a way to lead his own government to develop a foreign policy worthy of the American people and the ideals they support.

CHARLES WILLIAM MAYNES *is the President of the Eurasia Foundation.*

Man of the Times

by Harry C. McPherson, Jr.

MAX FRANKEL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY is a combination of virtues.

One is the story of a refugee from Nazi Germany, saved by his mother's guile and tenacity in finding cracks in the wall of totalitarian anti-Semitism. One is the tale of an ambitious reporter's rise from re-write man to foreign correspondent, to Washington bureau chief, and ultimately to the top editorial job of *The New York Times.* Another is the astute recollection of many critical events and personalities in the last half-century. Finally, *The Times of My Life* is a mature analysis of the standards, methods, and purposes of modern journalism.

It can and will be enjoyed on each of these levels. One example of his ability to limn a major figure, in this case one he knew from close range:

"I considered Khrushchev the most robust politician of my time. He was the first Soviet ruler with the wit and

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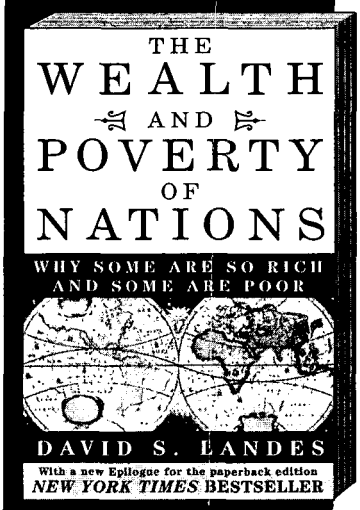

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courage to expose himself to his own people and to the world; the first to rule using his own name instead of a pretentious nom de guerre, like Lenin and Stalin; the first to call off class warfare; the first to leave his domestic enemies alive; and the first to deny that war with the capitalist West was inevitable. Even Khrushchev's demagoguery betrayed a peculiar honesty. When angered, he could bang his shoe at the United Nations and threaten to push Russia's abstract artists bare-assed into clumps of nettles. But he also told off the Chinese, warning a bellicose Mao Zedong that to hurry into the next world is not recommended, since no one has ever come back to tell us that life is better there."

THE TIMES OF MY LIFE
by Max Frankel
Random House, $29.95

For journalists and consumer-savants of the press, his account of the evolution of standards in news-gathering and writing is especially valuable. "The *Times* was slow to shake the old habits of 'responsible reporting,'" he writes, "which often meant little more than deferring to officials in positions of responsibility." When Frankel and his mentor in Washington, Scotty Reston, drew conclusions from a variety of unrevealed sources, weighing these on a scale of probability fashioned by their experience, New York wanted to attach some legitimating phrase to them, such as "officials (or at least, 'observers') said." It took persistence to break the habit. In time, "even our misnamed 'paper of record' was reporting events from an independent vantage."

Independent, but not infallible. "Newspapers flatter themselves by pretending that they produce the first drafts of history when history is their weakest suit. ... Journalism is shaped and defined by the virtues and vices of youth." By which I think he means, in both cases, a fixation on the immediate.

But Max Frankel is proud, almost at the risk of parody, of the *Times* itself: "It is the 'house organ' of the smartest, most talented, and most influential Americans at the height of American power." There is a revealing ambiguity in that sentence: For just as many such Americans read the *Times* and find their opinions shaped by its reporting, they also influence what it prints, through what they tell its reporters.

And this can have serious consequences. I close with one example. On Sunday, November 3, 1963, the *Times*' News of the Week section was given over to an extended analysis of the coup that had removed, and killed off, the Diem regime in South Vietnam. The message was that the Kennedy administration had concluded that something drastic needed to be done to strengthen South Vietnam's resistance to a Communist takeover; so an environment was created that led to the coup. The *Times* had no quarrel with that conclusion. As the paper put it: "Loss of South Vietnam to the Communists would raise doubts around the globe about the value of U.S. commitments to defend nations against Communist pressure." On the following page, a reporter, Max Frankel, laid out the case for concern in greater detail. The source of this Communist pressure, he wrote, was China. If it succeeded in driving South Vietnam to the wall, its brand of peasant-revolution would gain frightening momentum around the globe.

Thus in early November, 1963, editors of the *Times* and their star reporter in Washington saw the Vietnam War as a struggle of monumental significance for the larger contest between Communist China and the West. One supposes they were encouraged to think it so by articulate strategists within the U.S. government, who also believed it. That it turned out not to be the case was only an error on the part of the journalists. It was more dreadfully consequential to the country, and to Lyndon Johnson, who inherited the task of deciding what to do about it three weeks later: deciding in a climate of opinion formed in part by *The New York Times* reporting the thoughts of the "most talented, and most influential Americans at the height of American power."

HARRY C. MCPHERSON, JR. *was special counsel to President Johnson, 1965-1969, and is the author of* A Political Education *(Atlantic, 1972).*

UNCERTAIN GUARDIANS

The News Media as a Political Institution

Bartholomew H. Sparrow

The news media are often presumed to be a fourth estate, or fourth branch of government, serving as a check on the others. Sparrow argues that this is a mistaken notion. The media decide what to report, when, and how, and these decisions affect both the processes and outcomes of the political system. Blending original interview material with his own institutional analysis, Sparrow shows how the major U.S. news organizations can act contrary to the interests of the American public and democratic government. He investigates important recent examples in foreign policy, economic policy, and health policy in which the news media were unable to serve as guardians of the public interest. He also offers proposals to revitalize the news media to better serve the American public and the cause of representative government.

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Tidbits & Outrages

Besides, the portion was too small

Pizza Hut customer Joseph Schrage sued the pizza chain in Edwardsville, Ill., for the mental anguish he felt after he received a pizza that he says made him sick one night in 1997.

But can you take it PASS/FAIL?

Plymouth University in England recently announced that it would offer an academically rigorous bachelor's degree in surfing this fall.

But they didn't use a cigar

But he did manage to delete the rape and murder charges

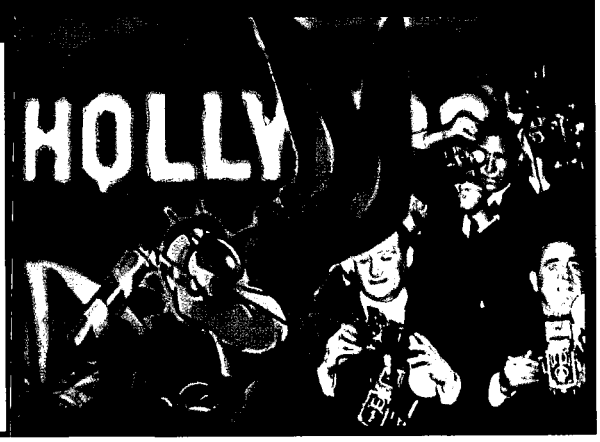
A new police dispatcher was shown how to use the computer system that held records of outstanding arrest warrants. He promptly typed in his own name and the system showed him his own arrest warrant for writing bad checks.

Anything to avoid the word intern

Some new job-titles added during the Clinton Administration's "Reinventing Government" Initiative: the deputy associate deputy secretary, the associate deputy assistant secretary and the assistant deputy assistant secretary.

Al Gore has already asked him for donations

The most recent celebrity to join the ranks of Hollywood's elite by cementing his hand prints at Manns' Chinese Theater in Los Angeles was the 25-year-old Nestle Quik Bunny.



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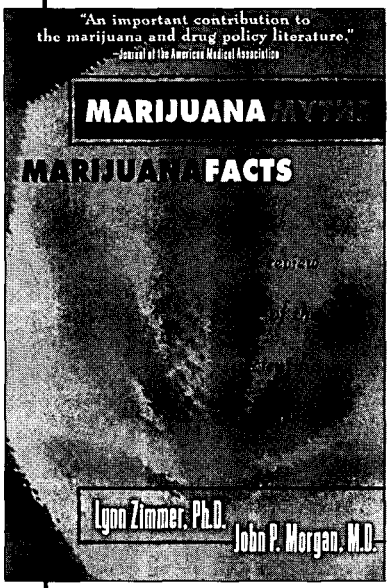

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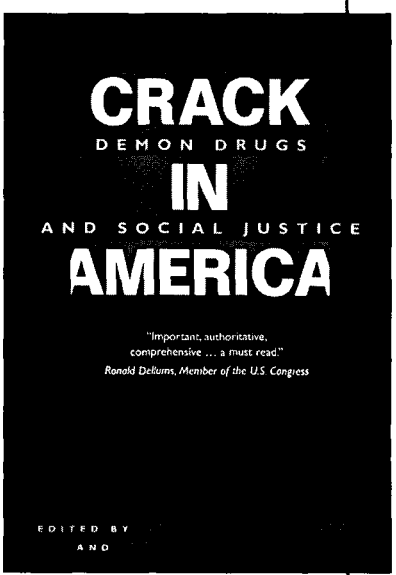

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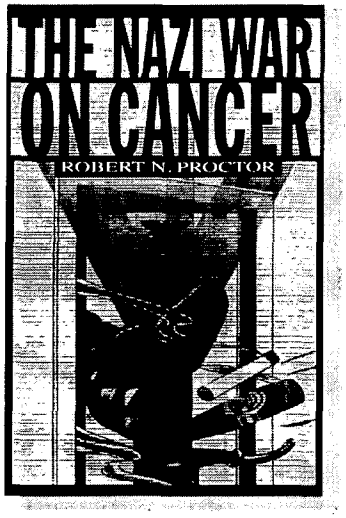

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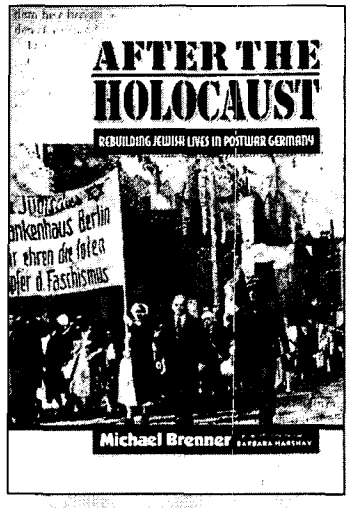

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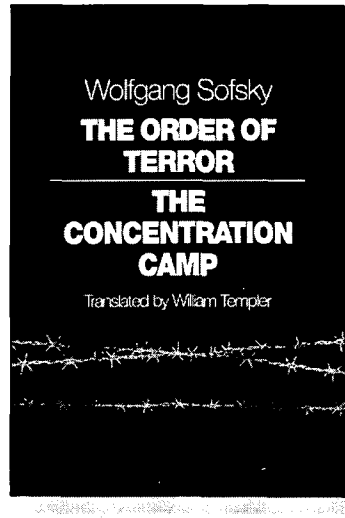

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